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The SPY NET by ARED WHITE

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Beginning a Gripping Novel

The SPY NET

CHAPTER I

A TIP FROM SWITZERLAND

NARROW ribbons of light crept indistinctly from behind drawn blinds on the upper floor of a rambling old caserne at the edge of the medieval French village. A village gendarme, on his midnight rounds, looked up for an awed moment at this one rift in the town's dismal blackness, crossed himself fervently and ambled on.

Those faint shafts were beacons of what just now had become the most vital spot in the universe. History was warm in the making behind those drawn blinds. In a long, severely furnished room half a a dozen men, middle aged, somber faced, but alert and sharp eyed, toiled patiently over great colored contour maps that were studded with multicolored pins and strung with thin strips of cardboard. Those strips and pins, very shortly, would become so many lines of advancing American fighting men.

In a small adjoining room sat a portly

of the World War Spies

A Three-Part Serial

By

ARED WHITE

man in his late fifties, his massive gray head bent low over a sheaf of typewritten papers. The chief of staff of the American Expeditionary Forces had given implicit instructions that he was to be disturbed tonight only in the rarest emergency. His concentration was such that he seemed a figure in wax as he studied the document on his desk, carefully weighing each word, phrase and sentence.

Those papers on his desk, when he had finished with them and they had received their final approval, would set in motion an immense concourse of young men. A number equal to such a city as San Francisco. And that movement of men would be translated into an epic of steel and blood, to take its place in history as the battle of Saint Mihiel.

An automobile roared into the headquarters village shortly after midnight, off the Paris road, and brought up with a shrieking of brakes at the outer gate of the caserne grounds while a dark shadow emerged from the tonneau and identified

himself to the sentry as an American infantry major. The major, on being passed, marched at a hurried gait to the caserne, mounted to the second floor and presented himself at the outer office of the chief of staff's official suite.

An *aide de camp*, on guard over the general's seclusion, debated briefly in a low tone with the major, hesitated a moment, then pushed his way gingerly into the chief of staff's inner sanctum. He stood nervously in front of the general's desk for several moments, shifting from one foot to the other.

"Sir—" he announced himself apologetically.

The general started violently at the snapping of his tension, then relaxed in his chair and looked up in patient inquiry.

"A cable courier from Liverpool, sir," the aide announced. "I thought possibly you would want to receive the message at once."

"Wouldn't the courier take your signature to the receipt?" the general inquired.

"No, sir. Says the message requires personal delivery, which made me think it must be something very important. I'm sorry if I've made a mistake in interrupting the General."

"You were quite right, Captain," the general approved quietly. "But if there was ever a time when I didn't want to be interrupted by any one, it is tonight. Show the courier in immediately."

As his aide hurried out, the general pushed a buzzer that summoned one of his confidential assistants from the map room. The courier from Liverpool entered smartly, delivered a large, sealed linen envelop into the general's hand, took the general's scrawled receipt for it and left without a word. The confidential assistant, a staff colonel, entered the room at the same moment. The colonel was young for his rank, brimming over with nervous energy, soft spoken and polite to his seniors, sharp, terse and often disagreeable with others. He took the envelop from his chief, slit it open with a pen knife and examined the contents with boring eyes.

"Enciphered, sir," he exclaimed. "In the special secret code from Washington."

The chief of staff rose at this announcement. The burdens of an overseas force of two million men rested comfortably enough upon his efficient shoulders. The gravest problems seldom harried him, even when he had been without sleep for days at a stretch. But a cable from Washington in that special code might change the whole course of important events.

The A. E. F. was a military independency within itself so far as its own laws and inner affairs were concerned. But its higher orders, of policy and command, came from the United States in the name of the President, supreme commander of Army and Navy. And this particular code was used only on rarest occasions and then on matters of major importance requiring absolute secrecy.

"I hope there's to be no interference with our Army plans at this late date," the general said anxiously. "There have been rumors of a change of overseas commanders, but surely that can't happen now. I wonder what's up."

"It appears to be rather brief, sir," reported the assistant. "My guess is it's a follow-up on that Switzerland espionage mess. G-2 has been standing by praying for further information from the U. S. as a basis for invading Switzerland."

The chief of staff turned expectantly to the colonel.

"Yes, yes, that's probably what it is, Cordon," he exclaimed. "I'd forgotten for the moment all about that Geneva matter. How long will it take you to decode the cable?"

"I'd say not more than half an hour, sir."

"Very well; when you've gotten it into plain English, bring it in and let me see what it looks like."

Colonel Cordon went to the large steel safe where the secret documents were kept under constant armed guard and signed for the special code book. There were but two copies of that code in existence. The other one was in a steel vault at Washington, D. C. Intermittently

both copies were destroyed by fire and a new code substituted, thus insuring the fullest protection against betrayal by the German secret service.

First the colonel reduced the litter of figures that made up the cablegram to letters. It was a complicated substitution cipher, and even with the key at hand, it took him some minutes to reduce the figure symbols to their letter equivalents. The broken cipher yielded the following incoherent sentence in code:

AKIR ANDO ZILO FAN EBEN YANDI
TEXA ALVA JE NATIO VETA AIDAR PADO
AJAR ELVA ORCHA HILA

By tracing each of those code terms down in the code book, he was able to write down slowly their true meaning. A message of some length was evolved from the jumble, since several of the code words represented full sentences, others phrases of several words each. The decoded cable read:

No further detailed information available affecting German spy concentration in Switzerland. Except that we are uncertain of identity of Count von Kulm previously reported in charge espionage group, our previous cable No. 4417 can be accepted at par. Imperative that danger be dealt with effectively and promptly. Secure purported Black Book if possible. Draw on US for any personnel desired. Caution all operatives against open violation Swiss neutrality.

Upon receiving this message from Cordon, the chief of staff read it through several times with great care.

"This passes the whole problem up to us," he said gravely. "I was in hopes Washington would handle it through the legation at Berne instead of putting it on our shoulders at this time. Well, it's a big job, Cordon."

"Personally, sir, I think German secret service propaganda methods are doing the Boche more harm than good. They're so infernally ambitious and diabolical."

"Evidently you forget that they give this Swiss nest credit for putting over the Russian revolution, which was a heavy blow to us," said the general. He added crisply, "However, let's not waste time debating that matter. We have our orders to locate this Switzerland nest and put Count von Kulm out of commission some way or other. What has G-2 been able to figure out thus far?"

"Sir, Colonel Rand has been laying plans for the past two weeks since that first cable tip came in from Washington. He told me yesterday when I checked up that he was busy laying the proper foundation."

"How many operatives has he sent into Switzerland?"

"None, sir, to the best of my knowledge. He seems a bit slow for some reason. I suggested that he have our legation attachés at Berne make the preliminary reconnoissance and try definitely to identify this mysterious Count von Kulm, or whoever is the head of the gang. Rand didn't take to that idea. He said he was grooming his star operative for the job, that youngster Elton who put over the big job in Paris last month."

The general's eyes kindled momentarily, then clouded again.

"A capable youngster, that. But see here, Cordon, doesn't this job look pretty big for a reservist captain? It's got its roots imbedded in world diplomacy, as I gather from the first Washington cable on the subject. If that's the case, isn't it rather absurd to send one man against a whole battalion of trained Prussian operatives, especially when they're entrenched in a neutral country and headed by a man who is rated a genius?"

"Yes, sir, that's just what I thought, General. But Rand tells me he's sending the captain for a preliminary reconnoissance. As soon as we know the situation, a lot of good operatives can go on over and wind the job up."

The chief of staff weighed this situation for several somber moments, then resumed his seat and drew the battle plans back under his eyes.

"Let him go ahead in his own way, then," said the general tartly. "But keep me posted from time to time on developments, Cordon. See that Rand doesn't minimize the problem, or handle it as if it were a petty embezzlement or some

D. C. I. matter. The commander-in-chief will be checking up on this as soon as he gets these Saint Mihiel operation plans off his mind."

CORDON had intended checking progress in the counter-espionage sub-section as soon as Colonel Rand was in from his billet the next morning. But as he passed down the long stone corridor on his way home an hour later, he caught a gleam of light over Rand's transom. At his knock, he heard footsteps hurry across the room inside. The door was thrown violently open to reveal Colonel Rand, his long, lean solemn face kindled with anxious expectancy.

Rand's face fell at sight of the chief of staff's confidential assistant.

"Ah, it's you, Cordon," he said with evident disappointment.

"Whom were you expecting, Rand?" Cordon taunted. "The Comtesse de Crillon, perhaps, you sly rascal?"

"I'm in no humor for nonsense," retorted Rand. "Is this a social call or have you something to take up with me? Come in."

"I supposed, of course, you'd be asleep at your billet hours ago," said Cordon a bit disagreeably. "Just happened to see the light over your door. But if you'll excuse me a moment, I believe I have a little document that will interest you."

He returned to his own office, took the uncoded cablegram from a locked safe, decoded it again, since his original had been burned after the chief of staff read it, and took it in to Rand. The latter seized the document, searched it avidly and groaned.

"A fine letdown this," the counter-espionage chief complained. "Naturally, I've been expecting that if Washington was smart enough to get the tip on that Swiss nest, they'd come across with some more useful detailed information. Now here comes this thing. The whole buck passed to me to locate Germany's latest and biggest spy nest and smoke the Hun intriguers out of a neutral country. Do they think we can perform miracles over here?"

"Anyhow, you know now just what you're up against, Rand," said Cordon unsympathetically. "But I came to tell you the chief of staff wants to know what progress you're making."

Rand filled his pipe and lighted it with nervous fingers, the while he debated the report he would make.

"Nothing to say just at present," he evaded shortly.

"But that'll not satisfy the chief," said Cordon. "At least you can outline some sort of progress. It's been two weeks now since Washington told us about the alleged Count Kulm and his operations."

"The fact is," said Rand, "I don't know at this instant just where I am. Naturally, I turned the preliminary work over to my best man, Captain Elton. He's made good on some stiff cases, as you well know. As soon as he has reconnoitered the situation in Switzerland, I'll follow up with as many operatives as are needed to mop up the mess. But at present Elton wants no one with him over there, and I don't think it good policy to force his hand, at least not until I'm convinced he's over his depth."

"You didn't tell me Elton had gone on over to Berne?"

Rand squirmed uncomfortably in his chair.

"He hasn't, for that matter," he replied with irritation. "But he is busy on the case from another angle just at present. That's what I'm doing here at this unearthly hour of night. He's overdue back right now, and I'm expecting he'll have something to report. I knew it was about time for you people to begin crowding me."

"Back? Back from where?" demanded Cordon.

The counter-espionage chieftain shook his head with annoyance.

"Elton pledged me to secrecy. But if you insist on prying in, I'll tell you in the strictest official confidence that he went to Bordeaux three days ago and

said he'd report back at headquarters some time tonight."

"Bordeaux, eh?" Cordon's eyes sparkled sarcastically. "What possible reason could any one have for going to Bordeaux to investigate a spy nest located in Switzerland?"

"Elton didn't want to explain and I didn't insist on knowing. But he must have had some good reason. He had me get an airplane for the trip and got a memorandum authorizing him to board the pilot boat down the Gironde from Bordeaux. He said something about wanting to see the liner *Franconia* as she rolled in from the United States."

The chief of staff's confidential assistant rose, a cynical smile on his thin, straight mouth.

"If you ever succeed in finding out, Rand, just what you're really doing on the most important case ever handed to the A. E. F.," he said crisply, "will you be good enough to let me know, so I can make a proper report to the chief?"

CHAPTER II

A COVERED TRAIL

COLONEL RAND looked at his wrist watch as he was left alone and saw that the hour was close to one o'clock. He had dropped in at the office at ten o'clock, hoping Elton might arrive early from his mysterious air journey to Bordeaux. Since there were a number of official papers and studies requiring his attention, he had waited in the thought that Captain Elton might arrive at any moment. And now that the front office was pressing him he decided to stick it out.

The Switzerland matter was causing the counter-espionage chief no end of worry. To begin with, it seemed almost insuperable in its difficulties. Germany's cleverest secret service organization was entrenched in the neutral playground of Europe, headed by a master of international intrigue of whom nothing was known except the mere name Von Kulm.

Neither French nor British were able to furnish any definite information on Von Kulm. There were reports afloat of his activity. He was credited with launching the Russian upheaval and putting Russia out of the war. He not only dealt in ordinary espionage reports, but directed world wide propaganda plots, launched schemes for blowing up Allied ships at sea, touched off ammunition factories, every manner of pernicious activity that went into the making of Germany's secret war.

So much of the man's activities. Of the man himself, nothing. Some said he was a Prussian manufacturing giant, a colossus of shipping and financial operations who had turned his genius to war usage in Germany's extremity. Others vowed that he was a simple militarist from Austria, a mere figurehead of the forces of mischief, giving orders and promoting plans which were promulgated by a young German dreamer of malignant war dreams. Others even contended that no such man existed. His identity was veiled in mystery.

Out of the woof and warp of diplomatic intrigue in Berne had come the tip of Germany's pernicious concentration of spies, intriguers, propagandists, revolutionists, a crew ranging from gentlemen adventurers of high title to plain thugs with prison records, it was hinted. The tip had been veiled in the greatest secrecy, given to the State Department at Washington under a seal of the strictest confidence. The intimation was that it had come from the minister of a neutral country.

Vague reference to a German Black Book, a document with which the intriguers intended at the proper time to intimidate both neutral and Allied statesmen into a trimming of their diplomatic and political sails, led to a reasonable theory that some neutral diplomat had passed the information along clandestinely for some good reason of his own. Perhaps in the hope that the United States would neutralize the German activity before it pressed too hard on certain distinguished diplomatic toes.

The first encoded cipher cablegram from the United States had laid out this alarming situation in its general details. The State Department had given the facts to the War Department, at the same time discreetly withholding the source of its information. Every effort had been bent toward getting details upon which to operate against what, for convenience, was termed the Von Kulm concentration. But tonight's cablegram had cut off all hope of useful inside information. Who was Von Kulm? Was that a mere spy *nom de plume?* Where in Geneva and Berne were the headquarters of the Prussian spy concentration? What neutral diplomat in Berne might be persuaded to work discreetly with American operatives in combating the German nest?

Rand's feeling of helplessness grew as he saw the magnitude of his responsibility and knew that it was for his men to grope their way into the conflict as best they might. As for going to Switzerland himself, he had no such thought. He was an executive, but not an operative. He lacked the alertness, the quick adaptability to swift emergencies, the knack of counter-intrigue, the imagination, the sensitive intuition that would be needed in Switzerland. He knew that the Germans would pick him up at the hour of his arrival on Swiss soil—perhaps would find his trail before he crossed the frontier.

Of his own limitations, Rand held no illusions. He was no more equipped for such work than was a major general to lead one of the infantry platoons into battle. Rand liked that comparison. He told himself it was not his job to lead the charge, but rather to remain in his command post, directing his young men as they went out and fought for victory. Older men planned. Young men fought. If the young men won, more glory and more rank for the older men. If the young men failed, those older men above went into the discard.

Just now Rand was staking his all on Captain Fox Elton, the operative who had outshown all others in dealing with the German secret service. Elton had won against the dreaded Baron Erich Wolf von Strindheim, in charge of the German spy center in underground Paris. He had trapped Count Wolfgang von Kastellaun, successor to Von Strindheim. These victories under circumstances of the greatest peril, and after the French secret police at Paris had failed.

Neither Von Strindheim nor Von Kastellaun were ordinary spies. They had dominated the important spy centers that gathered both military and political information in the French capital, had been painstakingly trained and entrenched before the war, and trapping them had required the highest order of intelligence, resourcefulness, energy and daring. The fact that Von Strindheim had escaped later from the French prison at Vincennes had been due to no fault of Elton's. Von Kastellaun had paid the penalty before a French firing squad at the old fortress outside the Porte de Bercy in the environs of Paris.

Added to a natural adaptability and much special training, Elton had an unusual equipment for difficult operations in that he was the ablest cipher expert in the Service. It was, in fact, his ability to break down quickly the most intricate German cipher that accounted for most of his successes. The German operatives were forever trusting their safety to their mysterious secret symbols in the fixed belief that their cipher devices were inscrutable. Elton's knowledge of ciphers and codes had been responsible for his presence in the A. E. F., the War Department having borrowed him for the duration of the war from the State Department, where he had served in peace time as an operative of the Department of Justice on important Government cases taking him into many countries.

He had come overseas under the bars of a temporary engineer captain, though except for his specialty he lacked even a saluting acquaintance with Army procedure, a shortcoming that had embarrassed him in his work only in that he had shocked the official dignity of high rankers at headquarters from time to

time by failing to observe all the medieval niceties of military courtesy.

THE HUM of a plane over the city stirred Rand from his thoughts shortly after one o'clock. He threw open the window of his private office and listened intently. The regular purr of the engines told him that it was an American or a French plane. The fact that it circled the city and came to earth north of the village stirred his pulse again to eager anticipation.

"Elton at last!" he said aloud.

The colonel was pacing the floor with the restlessness of a caged animal at feeding time when he caught the sound of footsteps in the corridor. Upon identifying the rapid, easy step as Elton's, he sat down at his desk, drew a pile of papers before him and pretended to lose himself in work, since it offended his sense of official dignity to disclose that he had waited up until such an hour for a junior officer.

At a terse summons to enter, which greeted his knock, Elton crossed the room and presented himself in front of the colonel's desk. A trim, well knit man, who was wholly at ease as he stood waiting —Elton's face was almost boyish, with a certain innocence of expression in his clear blue eyes, a suggestion of good humored simplicity in his well shaped features, that gave no hint of the incalculable agility and resourcefulness of mind behind the placid exterior, nor of the unshakeable poise that screened what was going on inside.

Elton's alert eyes sparkled with amusement as he noted that the colonel was poring over an obsolete personnel report of no moment. He divined that he was in for a grilling over the details of his trip, which he had insisted upon keeping to himself for good and sufficient reasons.

Rand shoved back his chair after a time, in the manner of a man who lays aside a painstaking task, and surveyed the young officer calmly. Elton's perfect poise at such moments as this never failed to irritate the colonel, even though he recognized its value in Elton's operations.

"You're late, aren't you?" he sparred casually. "Another half-hour and you would have missed me. I'm just finishing up. Well, what information to report?"

"A very successful junket, sir," reported Elton, helping himself to a chair, without invitation. "I accomplished my mission and made it back here without leaving the slightest trail. That was what delayed me in getting here."

Rand leaned forward and inspected the captain sharply. He saw for the first time that Elton wore the uniform of a private of field artillery.

"Working in disguise, eh?" he exclaimed. "Who are you now? One of our forty thousand Private Smiths? Without knowing what you're up to I'd say you needed rank on this Switzerland case."

"Just a temporary makeshift, sir," said Elton. "I merely had occasion to be as inconspicuous as possible on my trip to Bordeaux, and I believe I got away with it beautifully."

"Good." Rand eyed him with severity. "But isn't it time to quit talking to me in parables and let me know what you're doing—especially about this jaunt to Bordeaux?"

"I went down to Bordeaux for a chat with a particular friend of mine, sir," Elton elucidated. "It was important that I not be identified by the German secret service while at Bordeaux. So I landed at De Souge and beat my way into the city on a supply truck. Going back to De Souge, I had to walk seventeen kilometers after dark to find my plane. And then, to make doubly sure I was leaving no trail behind, we landed at Paris. I stopped there to see the Folies Bergère, had a bottle of champagne with the pilot and took off secretly at midnight. We just landed at Hanlon Field where I had Sergeant Walters waiting for me with a car. The plane took off back to Paris as soon as I was out of the cockpit and Walton drove me on into the village here. That covers all my movements, sir."

"Very detailed and specific," said Rand sarcastically. "But you carefully avoid telling me anything I want to know, or ought to know. I'm forced to wonder, Elton, if you really understand the tremendous scope and importance of this Swiss case?"

Elton suppressed a twinkle of amusement at his superior's thrust.

"Yes, sir, I understand," he replied politely. "It is not only the largest case I've ever been permitted to work on but, to be frank with the Colonel, it's the toughest case I've ever heard of in many ways."

Colonel Rand nodded with an exaggerated gravity.

"I'm glad you understand that," he said. "One might not guess as much from your actions."

"The bigger the job, the more necessary it is to keep cool and collected; isn't that true, sir?" Elton responded. "I believe the Colonel knows my aversion to talking too much about details when I'm going out to put my head against a hornet's nest. Frankly, sir, my plan wouldn't be worth a Besançon centime if I should retail my reasons for going to Bordeaux, and it might endanger unnecessarily the life of a friend of mine. The Colonel knows very well that an official secret turned loose even around headquarters may travel too far."

"All right, let it go at that," snapped Rand. "But I must require some information of your future plans for handling the mess. Look at this!"

HE TOOK from a locked drawer a rough abstract he had jotted down from memory of the secret cablegram Cordon had shown him, and read it in a low voice.

"So you see from that, Elton," he commented, "any hope we had of further information through the United States is all gone. If whatever slippery diplomat at Berne gave the tip to the U. S. only had the courage of a jackal, he'd at least offer to help us along under cover."

"That is a disappointment," said Elton, though there was no disappointment in his voice or face. "But that's why they are diplomats, sir, because they force other people to pull their chestnuts without exposing their own hands to the fire. However, we should be grateful at getting the tip. I'm still hopeful the French and British intelligence service may be able to give us some information."

"Maybe so," said Rand dubiously. "But now that the job is squarely up to the A. E. F., the chief is wanting to know things. A certain irritating ferret from up front has been in here on my neck a half a dozen times in the past three days. He wants a progress report, and was particularly disagreeable about it tonight."

"I'm able to report very satisfactory progress," said Elton with optimism. "I'd say the preliminary groundwork is off to a flush start."

"I have your word for that!" rejoined Rand. His eyes snapped impatience. "Now you will answer a few direct questions. First, are you definitely ready to start for Switzerland?"

"Everything settled, sir, except the exact time of leaving, which must depend on several things. But I'll delay no longer than absolutely necessary."

"See that you don't! Next, have you a logical plan once you are in Switzerland?"

"Yes, sir, in detail."

"Going over as an American deserter, I presume. Do you hope to get into bed with the German secret service as you did at Paris?"

"I'm afraid that game has been worked too often," said Elton, smiling broadly. "Such an approach wouldn't do at all in a case as important as this one. No, I'll use no disguise. I'm going into the enemy camp this time under my own name, although I would very much like to have permission to wear cits instead of a uniform."

Rand weighed this statement for some moments with knitted brows.

"That's easily arranged," he replied tartly. "But you surely don't expect to fool the Germans merely by leaving off

your uniform, and unless you keep them in the dark as to your plans, we'll all be made chumps of!"

"I'm counting on a certain bit of information we got in the cablegrams, sir; that reference to Von Kulm's Black Book."

"A mere reference. I certainly see nothing in that to help us in this situation."

"At least," said Elton with assurance, "it hints at a certain psychology in Von Kulm's camp that I hope to use to very good advantage."

Rand got up, his patience out of bounds, and gathered up his overseas cap and riding crop.

"Elton," he snapped, "if it wasn't for your past record and performance, I'd suspect you of grasping at straws, of being out on one long limb and trying to stall your way through. I'm tired of this thing for tonight."

"Sir, I'm glad my record protects me from the Colonel's suspicions," said Elton with his tantalizing serenity. He turned the conversation, "But I want the Colonel's help on one important matter before we go. I want a certain officer relieved from duty in Switzerland and sent back to Paris."

"So you can fit yourself into his place, eh? Well, if it is one of the legation attachés, please be advised that they are controlled from the United States."

"No, sir, I was thinking of a Captain—"

Elton paused in the way of a man whose memory has eluded him, and consulted a scrap of paper which he took from his pocketbook.

"Captain Edward Farnham, Signal Corps," he supplied the elusive name. "I have learned by prying among the travel orders that he has just been sent in there incognito to buy up watches, compasses and telescope lenses for the Army. While I dislike to pry any officer loose from a nice soft detail like that, yet I'm absolutely in need of his job a little later on."

"All right, I'll arrange it," said Rand. "But you surely don't expect to throw the Boche spies off your trail that way, I hope. My guess is they'll spot you before you've been in Switzerland half a dozen hours."

"Probably much sooner than that, sir," assented Elton. "I rather count on being picked up by their lookouts at the frontier. The most I hope for is to conceal my real mission for a few weeks. By that time—"

Elton broke off with a slight shrug of his shoulders and smiled enigmatically.

CHAPTER III

THE PURCHASING AGENT

IN THE two days that he had been in Switzerland on the prosaic mission of contracting for Swiss watches, compasses and lenses, Captain Edward Farnham, Signal Corps, U. S. Army, had succeeded in establishing himself most comfortably at an agreeable hotel in Geneva and had made a few pleasant acquaintances.

There was nothing about the captain's appearance or person to indicate that he was Captain Farnham. To preserve his incognito, he wore a blue serge suit of good cut, was registered at the expensive Beau Rivage as plain Edward Farnham, Paris, and had left behind at the American legation in Berne all travel orders and other documents concerning his military status. Since he was only an emergency officer, with very brief service to his credit, he carried no telltale military mannerisms about with him.

His first day in Switzerland had been spent in reporting at Berne, and in the pleasant journey to Geneva; by train to Lausanne and thence on down Lake Geneva by motorboat to the Quai du Mont Blanc, where his hotel fronted. He had been glad to leave Berne behind, since a sharp mannered under-secretary of the legation had found so much alarm in the captain's presence.

Swiss neutrality was such a sensitive thing, the secretary complained. Some one besides an Army officer should have been sent on this mission. The country

was so abominably overrun by German spies and Swiss secret police that Farnham ran the risk of having his rank betrayed, which would result in international embarrassments. Since Farnham was smilingly oblivious to the secretary's strictures, the latter ended up with a few parting admonitions against taking up with strangers and arranged for the trip to Geneva and Farnham's stay in Switzerland.

Farnham was a sturdily built man of perhaps twenty-four, with strong lined features, friendly gray eyes and a general air of easy good humor. He gave a first impression of being a man of the world, one who would fit himself in readily in any company, an impression supported by an easy *savoir faire* when he was about the Beau Rivage. He seemed sure of himself in the presence of titled personages and their elegantly gowned women as they moved about the gilded corridors or appeared, with a certain haughty aloofness, in the blue and gold *salon à manger*. The type of man for a soft military assignment.

Official business had waited this first day of his in Geneva while he went about viewing with unrestrained delight the wonder city at the end of the great blue lake, astride the swift blue Rhone and the murky gray Arve. Multicolored roofs, set close together in long terraced streets dipped to the gay boulevards bordering the water. Geneva was not unlike the French cities he had passed, except for the impressive landmarks that had survived the centuries. Touches of renaissance architecture, medieval statues, chestnut bowered terraces, towering cathedrals looking out of the ages, here and there a touch of every land under the sun.

An oasis in a world of horror, Farnham thought. There was a lively animation about the place, the throngs on the streets were not all heavy of face and fretful as in Paris. An absence of armless men, or men without legs, without eyes; no eternal reminders of the savage struggle that gripped a world in its crimson throes.

Once or twice during his pilgrimage, Farnham was sharply reminded that underneath it all there was a deep undercurrent of intrigue. He thought he was being followed. Either that, or there was an uncanny coincidence in the frequency with which he saw certain familiar faces. He dismissed these thoughts finally with a shrug. What did it matter? Times were heavy in Switzerland, these days. There were few to play in the playground of Europe, and so Geneva was stripped by the war of her richest income, the gold of those who come to Switzerland to play. The Swiss secret service would hardly pry too closely into the conduct of a good customer, so long as he bore proper credentials and was vouched for by his legation. As for the German spies, let them amuse themselves if they wished to follow him.

Through the late afternoon Farnham sat in front of his hotel, lost in the majestic grandeur of Mont Blanc, the enchanting opalescence of the Alpine glow, the kaleidoscopic tints of blue and gold on lake and horizon, the whole indescribably beautiful setting of the jewel city of the Alps.

He dressed for dinner, to escape the embarrassment of the evening before when he had been the only man at dinner in street clothes. Clandestinely, he studied the guests in the dining room. Many of the men wore gaudy decorations with their evening clothes. A cosmopolitan lot, he saw. Men and women from Hungary, from Greece, Serbia, Germany, France, from the Orient. Refugees for the most part, he had been told, or political exiles, men of title and wealth who had flocked to this haven out of the world storm, or were here for many reasons and divers purposes, best known to themselves. There were a few young men, vigorous and able, whose faces bore the stamp of countries at war. Farnham found himself wondering if they had fled from their duty, or merely served here on some secret mission or other, as he did.

The waiter who wrote down his order leaned over him confidentially as he

struggled with the French menu card.

"You may speak in your own language, sir, if you wish," he said. "You see, I speak English myself after a fashion."

Farnham looked up at the fellow in some surprise.

"Why do you take it that English is my language?" he inquired. "Do I look so very much like an Englishman as all that?"

"Pardon me, sir," said the waiter. "I observe my mistake. You are an American. We must learn those things here, where so many languages are spoken by our guests who come from the far corners of the world. But I wished to inform you, sir, that tonight we are honored by the presence of royalty."

Farnham's eyes focused immediately upon a group of men at a table across the room. The center of that group already had attracted him. A personage of great wealth, perhaps of title, he had thought.

"You have guessed, sir," said the waiter, *sotto voce*. "His Highness, the Khedive of Egypt."

Having imparted this bit of gossip, doubtless in the hope that the service would be reflected in Farnham's dinner tip, the waiter softly vanished. Farnham studied the Egyptian royal person while he waited for his dinner to be served. A dark, passive man, his face deathlike in its immobility and set off with slightly protuberant black eyes that were cold, hard and blasé. A super flunky of some sort, perhaps an aide de camp in civilian evening clothes, received the khedive's food from a special butler in livery, sampled it, seasoned it, set it in front of the royal person.

Four other men sat at the table. The man at the khedive's right shortly claimed Farnham's attention. A perplexing type, even in such company, since Farnham thought that the khedive's honor guest had the hardest face he had ever seen, a face that was sinister even in the hour of dinner relaxation when the man was obviously making himself agreeable to his distinguished host. For even when the man smiled it was but a slight drawing of thin, taut, bluish lips over large, stained teeth.

The fellow's eyes were deepset in a thin, angular, pallid face, astride a hawkish nose that beaked at the end to the point of deformity. They were very black, level eyes, that had a trick of moving slowly from one object or person to another, in a tense, penetrating sort of glare. The blunt, rounded knob of a jaw, set close and deep under the low, slightly outstanding ears, added to the straight brows and sloping forehead, heightened the aspect of a stubborn, unrelenting nature. A cunning, calculating wretch, Farnham thought, probably with an alert, conniving brain, though not of the highest order of intelligence.

A massive, fat man, to whom all deferred at such rare times as he joined the conversation, sat with his back squarely to Farnham. Of the two other guests, one was tall, thin, very restless, with a distinctly Prussian face, the other an obese little Swiss or German, with thick, pouty, very red lips and puffy blue eyes behind a thick *pince-nez* that was secured to a long, flowing black ribbon.

A sharp look from the khedive's aide routed Farnham's absorbed scrutiny of the royal party. As he dined, he looked about with simulated abstraction at the others in the room, among them several Swiss officers in uniform, a number of other soldiers who must have been accredited attachés of legations from their dress uniforms whose flashes of gilt and gaudy trappings suggested smart hussar regiments and household guards rather than the staid Swiss staff.

IN THE course of his observations, Farnham caught himself in the midst of an unintentional flirtation. Or rather an incipient flirtation, since he dismissed the exchange promptly. Two women sat at a table very near, both of rare beauty but of widely different types. They were dining alone. The one who had misinterpreted Farnham's interest in her was distinctly Spanish, with very large black eyes, deep

olive skin with an undertone of red at the cheekbones, crimson lips that played over fine white teeth, an ensemble of face, figure and vivacity to play havoc with the heart of a susceptible man. Her coquetry was not bold, merely a subtle, half amused, half friendly glance, a barely discernible brightening of her flashing eyes, a lazy toss of an elegant lace fan.

The other woman at the table paid no attention to him, not turning her head in his direction, although he sensed that the two were discussing him. He saw her face only in profile, the clear cut, fine features of a woman of breeding and education, he thought, and wondered at the two being together. Her beauty was no less remarkable than the other woman's, but it suggested something inaccessible, aloof, something to be admired from a distance, like a rare picture, one to whom the public coquetry of the Spanish woman must be offensive.

"A gentleman who wishes to speak with Monsieur Farnham, sir," the waiter interrupted his thoughts.

Farnham looked up to see an immaculately groomed young man standing at his table, his body bent forward from the waist in a polite pose.

"A thousand pardons, monsieur," the intruder spoke up quickly in a suavely polite voice. "But may I have the honor of a seat at Monsieur Farnham's table and a few words on a matter of our mutual interest? Permit that I present myself. I am Monsieur Za, of the house of Sigriswiller."

Farnham rose; hesitated a moment, and accepted his self-invited guest.

"Glad to have some one to talk to," he said affably. "Sit down and let me order something for you."

"Thank you, monsieur, for your graciousness," said Monsieur Za, seating himself opposite Farnham. "But already have I dined. It is only because tonight I must go to the opera that I intrude upon you at your dinner."

"At least you will let me order for you a bottle of wine," persisted Farnham.

"*Merci, monsieur,*" Monsieur Za accepted. "A small bottle of Troyssac de Rezière, if you insist. It is most excellent."

Farnham was trying to identify the very slight accent in which his guest spoke English. It was neither French, nor was it German. Monsieur Za was a spare, lithe, dapper little fellow with very smooth, pink cheeks, bubbling, shifty blue eyes, close cropped straw colored hair, and a general air of easy urbanity.

"I trust monsieur had a most pleasant voyage across?" the visitor exclaimed. "So often it is bumpy at this season, and therefore very disagreeable."

"Across—across where?" Farnham inquired a bit nervously. "Ah, you mean my ride up from Paris. It was very agreeable, except for the annoyance of changing trains at the frontier."

"Yes, to be sure," said Za. "But I was merely inquiring of monsieur's comfort in crossing the Atlantic. Between the lumpy weather and those abominable submarines—"

Farnham started at the question. It had not surprised him to have a caller, since he had made no secret of his mission at the hotel. He had readily guessed that Za represented some enterprising Swiss firm dealing in watches, compasses or lenses. But that he had just arrived overseas by liner from the United States, that he had never been in Paris, the city from which he was registered, he thought a secret of his own.

"Why do you assume that I have had a sea voyage, monsieur?" he asked dryly.

"Ah, monsieur, pardon if I have intruded upon a personal matter," Monsieur Za apologized zealously. "I did not know it was the—the secret. Pardon again, monsieur. In Geneva, where we deal with many, many nationalities, it is the custom to become most observant, monsieur. I merely observed that the color of your face, it is the brown of the salt water. But perhaps monsieur has been at Nice or Monte Carlo, and I have made the mistake."

"No matter, I was merely curious," said Farnham with evident relief. "As a matter of fact, I have had a short vaca-

tion at the seashore. You wished to discuss some particular matter with me, Monsieur Za?"

"Again must I crave monsieur's pardon," said Za. "But the competition it is terrific and the house of Sigriswiller is most enterprising, monsieur. When we learn that you wish to buy in large quantity the Swiss watch and compass, it is for me to urge that you interview the house of Sigriswiller, on the Boulevard de la Cluse, where in great quantity can we supply the need of monsieur's firm."

Za took a quick sip of wine.

"Or is it, perhaps, monsieur, that I have made the error and but annoy you with wares in which monsieur is not interest?"

"On the other hand, you have done me a very great service," said Farnham. "My one purpose here is to buy a large quantity of goods for my—my firm in the United States, through our Paris branch. I will by all means get in touch at once with your firm."

"*Bien, monsieur,* those words are sweet music to the house of Sigriswiller," effused Za. He leaned forward confidentially. "You see, so very many come to Geneva under false colors to conceal their real purpose, that I had a fear perhaps such a customer was too great a fortune. So your words have made me very happy. For a century have we been in Switzerland, the oldest house of all Geneva. No greater honor can come to us than to make monsieur's visit a pleasant one, entrée to homes and places, monsieur, that are wholly inaccessible to the ordinary visitor. At your convenience tomorrow, monsieur, the house of Sigriswiller will await you, and if you will name the hour the great Sigriswiller in person will attend your needs."

"At nine, if that hour is convenient," said Farnham. "I will—"

He was interrupted by a sharp commotion in the room. Men leaped to their feet; there was a metallic clashing of heels, a jingling of spurs. The gilded officers in the room were erect at attention. Slowly the others in the room joined them in standing, even the neutral Swiss officers standing at salute.

Monsieur Za got up.

"His Majesty Abbas Hilmi is leaving, sir," he prompted. "It is the custom here to rise for royalty."

Farnham got up reluctantly. He saw the swaggering khedive haughtily leave his place at the table and strut across the room, looking neither to left nor right, accepting the homage as his due. Behind him streamed the others, looking more or less self-conscious. Farnham's eye centered upon the wolfish man who had been seated at the khedive's right. His lean body bristled in its stiff erectness. Alone of the retinue in the khedive's wake, he seemed wholly unmoved by the attention bestowed upon the party.

"The khedive, what brings him to Switzerland?" Farnham inquired innocently, when the royal party was out of the room and they had resumed their seats.

"Ah, but he is no longer the Khedive of Egypt," said Za. "A difficulty with the English, monsieur, and he is out of his royal chair. A difference of sympathy, I have heard, over the great war. So Abbas Hilmi has come to live in the beautiful Alps—at least for the time being."

Farnham laughed.

"A lot of fuss to make over a ruler out of a job," he exclaimed. "These days aren't pleasant in the king business, are they? I think I'd much rather be a plain citizen, dealing in watches and things."

Za shrugged his shoulders.

"But life is the great gamble, is it not, monsieur?" he inquired. "Much rather, for me, would I gamble as a king for the universe. How magnificent! Yes, monsieur, even to gamble for the stars, and lose—a crown!"

"Anyhow," rejoined Farnham, "he seems to have saved enough out of the wreck to live on in state. That's something, to have a bunch of henchmen to salt your food and dance attendance."

Za leaned intently across the table.

"But Abbas Hilmi, may not he return

to greater power, when he has for friends such a man as the one with whom he dined tonight, monsieur?"

"You mean that man who sat at his right—that he was somebody?" inquired Farnham. "He looked to me more like a retired admiral."

"One of our great citizens, monsieur," said Za in a hushed voice. "A gentleman of great wealth and power, who honored Switzerland by leaving his rich estates in Austria and becoming a Swiss citizen since the war tore his country to shreds. It is a rare privilege you have had tonight, monsieur, of dining in the room with the Count Botha von Kulm."

Monsieur Za glanced at his wrist watch, arose quickly and apologized that he must leave to keep his previous engagement at the opera.

"At nine of tomorrow morning, monsieur," he said. "Monsieur Sigriswiller himself will be waiting to receive you."

CHAPTER IV

SEÑORA AND MADEMOISELLE

WHEN he came down for breakfast at seven the next morning, Farnham had the dining room to himself, except for one or two solemn guests and a couple of sleepy eyed *garçons*. It was plain to him that early rising was a lost art in Geneva, that the gay assemblage of the night before probably had betaken itself finally to sleep in that first ruby glow of the Alpine morning in which he had arisen.

He turned south, on leaving the hotel, along the quay, crossed the Rhone at the Pont des Bergues and strolled leisurely up the Grand Quai to the Promenade du Lac where he stood for some moments drinking in the phenomena of the sun rising bright and warm over Lake Geneva. As he moved south through the Rue d'Italie, a vague suspicion that he was being followed flashed into a certainty as he stopped suddenly to turn back to a shop window, only to collide with a portly, dour faced person who had been clinging absurdly close to his heels.

The fellow apologized profusely, doffed his hat and hurried on. Farnham watched him out of sight, smiling at the shadow's clumsy technique, and then resumed his quest of Geneva's scenic wonders. He had passed the Musée, the Palais de Justice with its conceit of magistrates in stone, their arms ending at the wrists, symbolical of their sterling honesty, and was standing before the Hôtel de Ville, studying its heavy renaissance, when he verified the presence of a second shadow close at hand.

The attention his presence was receiving now wholly amused him and he moved off at his sharpest pace, intent on giving this one a lively bit of early morning exercise. After crossing the Bastiens, he made a wide swing around the University and hurried the length of the Henri Dunant across the murky Arve. Once he retraced his steps on rounding a corner in time to come upon his shadow, fat, puffing, almost ready to drop from the unexpected exertion of the chase. Without pretending to notice the fellow or his dire discomfiture, Farnham hurried on, until as nine o'clock approached he had covered a matter of five miles. But he saw now that his victim finally had encountered relief, and a third shadow dogged his trail, one better endowed by nature for a grilling hike.

"Clumsy rats," he said to himself, and passed on into the Boulevard de la Cluse, where he entered the House of Sigriswiller punctually at the chime of nine o'clock.

An alert attendant, in waiting for him, greeted Farnham with an effusive politeness and escorted him through the great showroom with its high arched ceiling, expensively tiled floors and decorated walls hung with clocks of a hundred different designs. Monsieur Sigriswiller was a middle aged man, tall, pleasant mannered and with the reserved dignity of the fifth generation of successful purveyors in clocks and many kinds of instruments of precision, including artillery sights, azimuth instruments for coast guns, field scopes of various patterns, lenses ranging from field glasses to observatory equipment.

They came to quick terms on a large consignment of compasses and wrist watches. Farnham accepted the prices quoted, subject to final confirmation by his firm's European representative at Paris, Monsieur Dawes. They were exchanging pleasantries, at the conclusion of their business, when the obsequious attendant entered with much hand rubbing.

"Pardon, monsieur, if I disturb," he said timorously, "but when Monsieur Sigriswiller has a moment, the two important customers are arrived to consider the great golden chime clock for señora's lake château.

"You see that I am busy, Dosso," said Sigriswiller sharply. "See to it that you do not disturb me again until monsieur has taken leave at his own convenience!"

"That's all right," spoke up Farnham. "We have gone as far as we can until I hear from Paris. By no means let me keep you from business, Monsieur Sigriswiller. Besides, I must be leaving."

"It has been an honor to meet you, monsieur," said Sigriswiller, arising as Farnham made to leave. "Please to remember that any courtesy we are able to extend to you will be regarded a great privilege."

He walked with the American out of the office and toward the door. Two women in smart morning frocks were standing before a great silver chime clock, studying its elaborate carving. The head of the House of Sigriswiller had a sudden happy thought. He stopped, caught Farnham by the arm and whispered softly in his ear.

"Two ladies of the finest set," he said. "It has just occurred to me that I can pay you no greater homage than to present you if you wish. I feel most trustful that they will take no affront at an introduction to a distinguished young American."

"Thank you, monsieur," faltered Farnham. "As you please."

Sigriswiller greeted the women with polite deference, and explained elaborately that he wished to have a distinguished acquaintance share with him the great honor of meeting señora and mademoiselle.

"Señora Ricardo Quarazza, I present Monsieur Farnham. Mademoiselle Le Rivet, the Monsieur Farnham," he announced.

As the two women turned to him, Farnham lost his voice momentarily. He recognized the two women who had sat at the adjoining table last night, Señora Quarazza the one who had shown such an inclination to flirt with him.

"Monsieur Farnham, you I have seen before, yes?" exclaimed Señora Quarazza gaily, in English that had only the faintest touch of Spain. "Oh, yes, I remember. It was you sat near us at dinner at the Beau Rivage and attempted so much to flirt, you ver' bad man!"

"Surely, no one could blame me for that, Señora Quarazza," said Farnham, taking her hand and making his best European bow.

"Ah, now I know you are the flirt, monsieur," she bantered him. "Was it not most absurd that I say to mademoiselle I think you are ver' bashful?"

"Dazzled—that is perhaps the proper word if I seemed uncomfortable last night," Farnham responded with an engaging smile. "I did not dream that I would be honored so soon with an introduction."

They chatted for several minutes, Mademoiselle Le Rivet maintaining an aloof reserve, the air of inaccessibility that brought her so sharply in contrast with the vivacious señora. Farnham saw that her full face was as remarkably beautiful, the features as clearly and yet delicately chiseled as the profile he had seen at the Beau Rivage. Mademoiselle's eyes were very large and thoughtful, with inscrutable blue depths that hinted strangely of sadness, almost of tragedy. Her brows were patrician arches, her nose thin, well molded and sensitive, over a perfectly proportioned mouth, whose subtly rounded lips reflected the vague somberness of her eyes. A woman accustomed to refinement, to the associa-

tion of genteel folks, Farnham thought, whereas the señora's superficial flash might have had its origin in the vineyards.

"You are a guest at the Beau Rivage, yes?" the Spanish woman inquired at parting. "Often we motor in for dinner from the château and perhaps we shall see you again," she added. "Geneva is a ver' gay city, monsieur, and also ver' lonesome. *Au revoir, monsieur.*"

IN THE course of the next few days Farnham saw a great deal more than he might have hoped of Señora Quarazza and Mademoiselle Le Rivet. Every afternoon they were together, riding about Geneva in the Quarazza limousine, an English car of the most expensive manufacture, in which the señora graciously insisted Farnham must see the city and countryside since Geneva motorcabs were such wretched makeshifts.

Before the week was ended, he found himself shabbily neglecting his official business. Señora's invitations for rides in the country, for luncheons at picturesque *pensions* set on the high banks of the lake with Mont Blanc looming above the flower bowered dining terraces, Farnham found irresistible. When he would plead that his business affairs required some attention, señora would shake an admonitory finger at him and remind him that business would go on forever, while the summer of Geneva with its vivid invigorating days and soft enchanting nights would shortly pass on.

If Farnham had any suspicions of ulterior motive, they found no substance in the actions or conversations of señora and mademoiselle. Throughout the sparkling days of the early week, they asked no questions, showed no curiosity as to what he might be doing in Geneva. Señora was the wife of Señor Ricardo Quarazza, attached in some capacity to the Spanish legation, herself the niece of the ambassador to an Oriental power. Mademoiselle, he gathered, was a summer guest of the Quarazzas, here from Constantinople, where she lived with her uncle. Beyond that he learned nothing of her. But the very setting of their lives told of wealth and position. Since Señor Quarazza was absent from Switzerland on a mission, a fact which señora referred to frequently and with evident satisfaction, Farnham thought it natural enough that she should wish to amuse herself with a lively flirtation. The discreet need of a chaperon might account for mademoiselle's presence on all their excursions. But that two women so widely opposite in disposition and tastes should be held together, hinted at a mysterious tie, that Farnham found himself unable to fathom.

From the first, Farnham found it difficult to conceal his strong preference for Mademoiselle Le Rivet. Her aloofness gradually softened into a spirited friendliness. Since Señora Quarazza was the hostess, he tried to conceal this preference. But the Spanish woman, doubtless used to her own way with men, would flare, playfully resentful when he showed too much attention to Le Rivet. She demanded his whole attention, which only resulted in a certain repugnance to her on Farnham's part.

"I believe it is mademoiselle with whom you are falling in love," she chided him, half playfully, almost in earnest, as they were returning from luncheon at Nyon one afternoon. "Perhaps I have become the dreadful chaperon who is always ver' much in the way."

"Ah, but I must guard myself, señora," he parried gaily, "against the Señor Quarazza's nimble saber. No doubt the señor is very jealous of a wife so beautiful."

Señora snapped her fingers spitefully.

"That for Don Ricardo!" she said with eyes flashing. She shrugged her complete indifference. "If he should never return it would be much the same to me, monsieur."

Farnham, as they delivered him at the Beau Rivage in señora's car, was expressing his sorrow that he must leave on the morrow for Berne and Basel when Mademoiselle Le Rivet interrupted.

"But, monsieur," she protested, "it is

already arranged that tomorrow you shall receive a very important invitation. I said nothing because it was to be a surprise, but it is an invitation no man in Switzerland would wish to refuse."

"I am very grateful," said Farnham. "But I've already made appointments and arranged my schedule. You see, both of you have made it so deliciously pleasant for me here the past few days, that I have neglected my responsibilities, quite naturally."

"Can't you stay?" pleaded mademoiselle. "It was I who arranged that you shall be the dinner guest of the most wonderful château on Lake Geneva, where you'll meet people worthwhile in the terribly exclusive international set from Geneva and Lausanne."

Farnham hesitated.

"Besides, monsieur," she prompted him, "we are counting upon you. Surely a dull matter of business is not to spoil our evening?"

"Indeed, mademoiselle, you tempt me beyond my power of resistance," Farnham yielded. "If I am to have the honor of being your escort, I shall cancel my other engagement by telegraph instantly."

"Mademoiselle's wonderful power over you, monsieur," pouted Señora Quarazza. "I suppose had I asked you, you would have gone on to Berne, yes?"

"But you did not invite me, señora," Farnham evaded.

The Spanish woman's eyes gleamed ominously at this subtle wound to her vanity and she sank back in the cushions to sulk in silence.

"At nine of Friday night, monsieur, we will call for you," said Mademoiselle Le Rivet. "Our boat will be at the Quai promptly."

"You have not told me the host whose château is to admit me," Farnham complained, as they made to leave.

"A wonder palace, monsieur," she replied. "We are to enjoy the incomparable hospitality of the Count Botha von Kulm."

CHAPTER V

A GAME OF BACCARAT

ON THE next evening, a few moments before the appointed hour, Farnham left the Beau Rivage and crossed the Quai du Mont Blanc to the jutted boat landing. The purr of powerful motors sounded over the placid waters of Geneva, and promptly at nine a large motorboat drew up, a craft closely resembling in power and comfort the captain's gig of a first class battleship.

Señora Quarazza's voice hailed him jauntily, telling him to board with care so as not to take a bath in his evening clothes. Except for the boat crew of three men, engineer, helmsman and cabin flunky, the women were alone in the boat, resplendent in evening wraps and flashing gems.

Even in the soft light, the difference in caste of the two women stood out conspicuously to Farnham's eye. The Spanish woman was almost garish in the vivid coloring and daring of her gown and the extravagance of diamonds, rubies and emeralds with which fingers, ears and throat were plastered. Her straight jet hair, glistening with exotic perfumed oil, was drawn taut from her brow and gathered in a high Spanish knot at the back of her head by a sunburst of diamonds. This finery seemed to stimulate her with an unusual vivacity and she sat close to Farnham, clinging to his arm, chatting voluble nonsense and plying him with all her wiles of coquetry.

Farnham made himself agreeable, tactfully concealing his growing distaste for the woman's advances and his rapidly growing preference for Mademoiselle Le Rivet. Mademoiselle sat across the cabin from them, her eyes fixed thoughtfully in the distance as if lost in the riot of multicolored shore lights that danced in the starlit Lake Geneva. She was dressed for the occasion but with a quietly effective taste; and if señora bubbled over with spirit, mademoiselle was silent and thoughtful to the point of depression.

"Please to be gay, Gizele," Señora

Quarazza bantered her. "One would think you had no thoughts, you are so quiet of late. Or is it that you are ver' jealous of Monsieur Farnham's attentions to me, yes?"

"One need not chatter forever in order to have thoughts," replied mademoiselle with a touch of annoyance. "As for monsieur's attentions, it seems to me that has become a very one sided display, Carlotta."

"Ah, then you surrender, Gizele," the Spanish woman gloated, missing the sly point of mademoiselle's thrust. She pressed Farnham's arm and looked up at him coquettishly. "Anyway, monsieur, you see I have taken possession of you, is it not?"

"I should consider myself a very fortunate man, shouldn't I?" said Farnham with forced gaiety. "Even to be the subject of jest between two such lovely ladies."

"You are ver' modest, monsieur," cooed señora, "but perhaps it is that I am ver' serious."

The boat changed direction, easing toward the shadowy banks of the lake. The attendant came into the cabin from aft and stood ready to draw open the door and assist them in landing. Farnham's eyes narrowed as he saw the fellow's face. A fat, puffy little man. Somewhere he had seen that face. Quickly it placed itself in his mind. The short winded shadow whom he had raced over half the streets of Geneva the day of his visit to the House of Sigriswiller.

As the flunky made his exit to cast a rope at the command of the engineer, Farnham turned to Señora Quarazza.

"An attentive servant, indeed," he said casually. "One who has been a long time in the service of Señor Quarazza, I surmise."

Mademoiselle Le Rivet hastened to answer the question herself.

"Merely a pickup, monsieur," she said. "It is very difficult to get sufficient competent servants these days. Señora is so helpless when Don Ricardo is away, aren't you, dear? So I located this one for her while I was in Geneva yesterday, and I hope he proves satisfactory."

A gilded major-domo helped them ashore. They stepped from the boat into a small room, its walls mostly mirrors. Immediately it began to move upward at an angle of forty degrees, with the smoothness of a modern elevator. After a brief ascent, the gilded functionary opened the doors. Farnham followed the ladies into a broad reception hall, the formal entrance of the great château of the Count Botha von Kulm.

FARNHAM found himself in a place in which feudal splendor and modern magnificence had combined their best. Orient and Occident had been searched for their rarest treasures, ancient and modern, and the château of Von Kulm, standing on the heights overlooking Geneva, might easily have claimed the more ambitious title of palace or castle. Von Kulm must have had tastes as luxurious as those of the Louis' who wrecked France, and the power of a colossal wealth with which to indulge those tastes. Not even America boasted many such homes, Farnham thought.

The company was of a brilliance for the setting. Resplendent uniforms predominated among the men. The few Swiss officers who were present, in their severe uniforms, seemed out of place, discordant notes in the medley of tinsel and vivid color. Some of these, Farnham observed, were officers he had seen dining at the Beau Rivage. Others must have come from the legations at Berne, attachés of many powers, neutral and belligerent.

French, American and British uniforms were conspicuous by their absence, but Farnham was able to identify the regalia of Prussian Uhlans, Austrian dragoons, Spanish grenadiers. An Indian potentate whose turban was clasped in front by a sapphire as big as a walnut. A Japanese in naval uniform, two smart Turkish officers with the flowing gold aiguillettes of aides de camp.

The subdued melody of a large orchestra, concealed in a broad alcove just under

the vaulted dome of a great reception hall, myriad light clusters blended in soft tints, exotic perfume, the hum of voices, the coming and going of silent, liveried servants and functionaries; Farnham pulled himself out of the daze into which the scene had thrown him at first. He had managed to put himself at ease by the time Carlotta and Mademoiselle Le Rivet were ready for presentation to the host.

Count Botha von Kulm received his guests with a stiff formality. Farnham thought the count spoke to him without being in the slightest degree conscious of his presence when he was announced. Carlotta received a slight inclination of the head and a terse word. In contrast with this, Mademoiselle Le Rivet was greeted with a polite bow from the waist, executed in evident deference.

The count's personality, the incongruity of that personality cast as host in such a setting, puzzled Farnham more than ever. Von Kulm, Farnham thought, would fit perfectly into a cavalry camp, or on a horse at the head of a brigade column in the field. He could imagine the fellow fuming over a rusted snaffle bit, dealing out summary discipline for some minor infraction of tactics or technique in the field, or grimly sending in his last reserve of manpower against a forlorn hope. But as the dictator of a vast fortune, amassed either by his own genius or inherited, whimsically lavishing his attentions upon brilliant functions, Von Kulm appeared grossly out of his element.

The guests were seated for dinner with strict formality, according to their rank. Farnham was placed inconspicuously at the table, beside Carlotta, who had taken full possession of him. Mademoiselle Le Rivet had excused herself some minutes before, and Farnham came in now for another surprise at finding her placed far up the line, among the notables of the occasion, with precedence over what must have been several important attachés and their wives. For escort she had a wizened, bald old man, with the skin of a gourd, who wore the gilt and metal littered uniform of an honorary colonel of Magyar Honved Hussars.

An army of servants brought in the dinner, a butler for each two guests. The dinner progressed with a rising of gay chatter as the rich wines disappeared. Orchestras played softly in varying moods, while entertainers danced, sang or juggled without any one paying the least attention to them. After the champagne, which flowed bountifully for the better part of an hour, the host arose with the stiffness of a colonel ending the regimental mess, and the guests scattered about the château.

"Ah, but, monsieur, I have it," exclaimed Carlotta. "Come, we will join some of my friends at baccarat. You know how to play the baccarat, yes?"

"I have heard of the game but never played it," said Farnham dubiously.

Carlotta laughed noisily. The champagne had increased her tempo noticeably.

"Such a provincial, monsieur!" she rebuked. "Much joy have you missed if never you have gamed for francs."

"My education in gambling has been confined to poker with pennies," said Farnham.

The Spanish woman entwined her arm in Farnham's and pressed very close.

"Or perhaps you have gamed in hearts?" she insinuated. "At that game, monsieur, you must be ver' lucky." She pressed his arm close, and half leaning on him, led the way up a marble stairway to the floor above. "I will show you the baccarat, monsieur," she said. "I am so ver' unlucky tonight in the game of hearts, perhaps the baccarat will sympathize!"

On the floor above, in a succession of alcoves set in a broad hall, many of the guests had gathered in small intently chatting groups. Uniformed attachés smoked and drank, with an occasional civilian among them, the ladies mostly apart in groups of their own.

"Stupid men," said Carlotta, with a shrug of her shoulders as she looked about. "When they are too old for love they talk and talk and talk with themselves of strange things." She leaned close again

and laughed. "Champagne, it loosen the tongue and the heart, monsieur, but your heart, it must be of ice, or is it that Carlotta is so ver', ver' distasteful?"

"You are wonderfully beautiful, señora," rejoined Farnham without looking at her. "But I must remember Señor Quarazza who is not present to defend his own interests."

"*Diable!*" she spat. She raised her hand in front of his face and snapped her fingers. "That for Don Ricardo! Have I not tell you this before, monsieur? Between Don Ricardo and Carlotta there is no love."

"That, I should say, is most unfortunate for the unhappy señor," Farnham evaded.

THEY passed across the great lounging hall and entered a large room whose air was heavy with tobacco and incense. A score of men and women were centered at a baccarat table, laughing, talking, drinking champagne and plunging at the game. One of the guests had essayed the rôle of banker and was covering all bets with colored markers; a thin, square shouldered man, whose head was as square as his shoulders. His face was flushed, his eyes glistened. Farnham, for the moment, found himself more interested in this man than in the game. A face etched in straight, severe lines, a small bristling mustache graying at the ends, no less than a half-dozen bright scars on his leathery cheeks and forehead, scars that might have been caused by a rapier or again by shrapnel, or by the combination of both.

Carlotta squeezed herself into a place at the table and drew Farnham by the hand close behind her.

"Ten thousan' francs, monsieur," she commanded the self-appointed banker.

"*Ja, señora,*" he assented, passing her a small pile of the colored markers.

She placed them about on the numbers. A turn of the cards and her markers grew. Half a dozen bets and her pile had trebled. She moved back her chair for a glass of champagne, took a large black cigar from a jeweled humidor, lighted it and puffed with evident relish.

"Love it turns from me, monsieur," she said half sadly to Farnham. "Now do I know it, for if it were not so, the game would not smile on me as it does. If you should play, monsieur—" she smiled pensively and shrugged her shoulder—"not one centime could you win. From you, every bet would the croupier take, since at the game of hearts you are ver' lucky."

"In that case—" Farnham smiled—"I think I'll not risk a bet."

"Ah, but Carlotta will place the bets for you, monsieur," she rejoined. "As you have seen for yourself, monsieur, I can not lose tonight."

Farnham flushed. He knew that the stakes were too heavy for the resources of an American Signal Corps captain. One or two bets, of the sort Carlotta made, would wipe out a captain's pay for a full year. He thought rapidly.

"Only a thousand francs, then, señora," he assented. "I am not prepared at this moment to bet more heavily than that."

"A thousand francs, then, monsieur," she exclaimed. "So quickly it shall grow to many thousand francs!"

She took from him the proffered note of a thousand Swiss francs, waved it above the table for a moment and placed it on the turn of the cards. The deal ended. The banker deposited several markers on the lucky note. Carlotta withdrew the cash and placed the markers about the board. Swiftly Farnham's investment grew with Carlotta's own plunging bets. At the end of half an hour she turned to Farnham.

"It is enough," she said, suppressing a yawn. "I am weary of the game."

She cashed the markers. The banker smilingly paid out a pile of Swiss currency of larger denominations. Carlotta segregated and counted it, thrust her portion in her bodice and arose to tender to Farnham a roll of notes.

"It is your winning, señora," he protested. "I will accept only the return of my original investment."

"It is what you have won, monsieur," she replied, thrusting the money resolutely into his waistcoat. "Is it not as I tell you, that tonight Carlotta is ver' unlucky? Only at baccarat can I win."

They returned through the lounging hall, descended to the lower floor and Carlotta pointed languidly to the broad terrace outside.

"It is hot inside, monsieur," she said. "Please that you take me to the terrace where we may be more alone."

"But we have been neglecting Mademoiselle Le Rivet," he said. "It is hardly polite to forget that she came here with us."

"Mademoiselle Le Rivet!" blazed Carlotta. "It is for her—"

The appearance at this instant of mademoiselle herself interrupted the Spanish woman's outburst. The elderly officer with the bald head and drawn leathery skin brought her to them, bowed deeply, took three backward steps bowing at each one of them, and turned away to join a group of his fellows.

"We have been looking for you, my beloved Gizele," Carlotta effused sweetly. "I really think monsieur was ver' lonesome, or perhaps it was he was jealous of the Feldmarschal-Leutnant Baron Oberhelfenschwil."

"The baron is a charming dodo," replied Mademoiselle Le Rivet, "even if he does amuse you so much, Carlotta. I had only to hint at it and he has arranged that we shall attend a most wonderful function, one to which only the most fortunate will be received by Count Kulm." She turned to Farnham. "And you are to come with us, monsieur," she exclaimed. "The night of Monday, at nine we are to arrive."

"But my journey, mademoiselle?" Farnham gasped. "I have put it off—"

"It can wait again, monsieur," she told him. "The affair of Monday, it is in honor of his Highness, Abbas Hilmi, and we shall be honored by meeting, too, the Grand Duke Michael, who holds Russia in the palm of his hand."

Farnham debated his uncertainty very briefly and yielded.

"Of course," he said in a thin, uncomfortable voice. "Nothing could be so important as that. But I really shouldn't."

"We must be taking our leave now," mademoiselle decided. "The guests have been slipping away for some time and it will shortly be daylight."

Farnham consulted his watch. It was after three o'clock. Some of the uniformed legation attachés were leaving with their ladies. Others continued to drink and chat in small groups. Farnham wondered at the steadiness of their legs, the restraint of their voices after the night's heavy drinking. Four or five bottles of champagne must have been the portion of more than one. Men handled their liquor well in Switzerland, he thought. Perhaps it was the part of discretion, where ready ears might be straining for a single careless word or phrase.

Farnham remembered a certain dinner in Washington, months before. A brilliant dinner at a grand mansion, where the secret *motif* was that the hostess put a single phrase into the President's ear in the course of the evening. A phrase that required no answer, no comment. Ten thousand dollars in wine, flowers and music to plant a thought, to drop a single seed in the hope that it would take root in the executive's brain. And a careless word, a glass too much of Count Botha von Kulm's champagne, might have dire consequences in the game of world diplomacy now centered in Switzerland.

When Señora Quarazza's motorboat dropped him at the Quai du Mont Blanc, Farnham said his *adieux*, went at once to his apartments, and sat down with his eyes through the window on the first turquoise glow over the distant Alps. But his mind was back in the château of Von Kulm, recounting the night's dazzling events. Von Kulm now puzzled him sorely. Presently, as the sun crept in at the window, Farnham rose with a shake of his head and prepared to disrobe.

From his pocket he took the roll of notes señora had won for him and counted them slowly.

"Twelve thousand francs," he exclaimed to himself.

Nearly three thousand dollars at the current exchange rate. He had not realized that his bet had accumulated to such proportions.

"Money appears to be no object in Geneva," he ruminated, viewing the banknotes with a whimsical smile.

CHAPTER VI

THE ROYAL HAND

THE INTERVENING three days until Monday night, Farnham spent in the rambling indolence of a man who has neither mission nor purpose, except to kill time. He used up Saturday in wandering about the environs of the city, looking, with the simple curiosity of a provincial, at the ancient landmarks such as the Cathedral of St. Pierre, with its Gothic spires that were older than the ship that took Columbus to America, and boasting stalls that were done by the Florentine sculptors. Several hours he spent at the École d'Herlogerie, in the shadow of Notre Dame, studying the museum of timepieces that traced the modern watch from the earliest method of keeping time, to the latest creation in Swiss watch ingenuity. A logical interest, in view of his mission in Switzerland. On Saturday evening he went, not to the Kursaal where men of many climes foregather under the bright lights, but to the amusing Theater Apollo.

From time to time Farnham glimpsed the shadows who dogged his footsteps. To these he gave small attention. One of them, whom he had observed several times during the day, had a seat immediately behind him at the Apollo, and dined near him after the performance at the Kiosque of the English gardens. He smiled at these precautions, his every movement being kept under observation. Doubtless, he thought, the detailed narrative of his movements would be studied anon by some one qualified to decide just what meaning his movements had during these three days of marking time in Geneva.

Sunday he spent on the lake and rivers, along the quays, strolling the promenades of the lake front, crossing and recrossing the bridges of the Rhone, asking an occasional direction of a gendarme, but avoiding other contacts. Monday his movements were equally provincial; the morning roving by cyclecab, the afternoon in the Hôtel de Ville with its historic frescoes and statues, and at the Musée with its treasures of antiquity; prehistoric remains, priceless relics in bronze and pottery from the days of the Phœnicia and Cyprus, paintings representative of the greatest Swiss artists of all times, military uniforms and impedimenta that depicted graphically the rising grandeur of war from the dark ages when men slaughtered their fellows with a blade on the end of a pike on down to the present enlightened period of hurling death a dozen miles.

Farnham ended his three days of innocent exploration in time to dress for an early dinner at the Beau Rivage, and a stroll to the post office at Rue Mont Blanc where he sent a brief telegram to an address in Paris, stating simply that he had been unavoidably delayed in leaving Geneva.

Señora Quarazza's motorboat arrived at the quay in front of the hotel exactly at nine, the same moment that Farnham reached the lake front ready to embark. Carlotta was bubbling over with animation. She greeted him with outstretched arms, kissed him lightly on both cheeks and drew him down beside her in the cabin.

"If I am so happy," she exclaimed. "It is because I have ver' wonderful news. Can you guess?"

Farnham shook his head, then brightened.

"Ah, yes, I have it," he ventured. "You have news that Señor Don Ricardo is returning home."

"Por Dios!" she flared. "It is that Don Ricardo will not return for one, two, perhaps three months!"

He offered no comment and looked across at Mademoiselle Le Rivet, who seemed even more thoughtful and somber than on their first trip to the château of Von Kulm.

"I have felt very guilty the past three days, neglecting my affairs so shamelessly," he said, addressing them both. "But now that the hour is here I can only feel grateful for your kindness in asking me."

"We have only done our duty by a most amiable gentleman alone in a strange land," responded Mademoiselle Le Rivet, a vaguely whimsical note in her voice.

But Carlotta was not to be diverted by Farnham's attempt to lead the conversation into safer grounds. She moved close to him and entwined her arm in his.

"You are not pleased," she pressed him, "that the señor will not return for so long a time, yes?"

"It will hardly be the thing, would it," he avoided her, "for me to gloat over the señor's ill fortune?"

"Monsieur is a ver' stupid or a ver' clever man," Carlotta pouted.

"I've often been accused of the former," laughed Farnham. "Seldom of the latter."

The château of Von Kulm was more resplendent than on the preceding Friday. There were fewer in civilian dress, a greater number of gorgeous uniforms, an orchestra of perhaps a hundred instruments, more servants and major-domos than before. The guests were placed formally in the great reception hall, according to station; and Abbas and the grand duke were announced from the great stairway.

The ruffles and flourishes of royalty were sounded by trumpeters and drummers in the dress of the Russian household guard. Farnham wondered that Abbas Hilmi claimed precedence over the Russian grand duke. The khedive was out of the picture, so far as the Egyptian throne was concerned. The English had seen to that in a most decisive manner. The grand duke, on the other hand, had taken over the chaotic affairs of Russia as regent upon the overthrow of the Czar, Farnham remembered, and might again come into great power. What mission, then, brought him to Switzerland at this critical hour? What social law gave an ex-khedive precedence over the possible ruler of all the Russias?

THE grand duke and Abbas Hilmi both appeared in military uniform, the khedive's topped by a scarlet fez. They bowed with an impressive reserve to Von Kulm's guests, who responded with the knee bending obsequiousness due royalty while these two haughty mortals made their way to the grand banquet hall. A liveried waiter for each guest tonight. Rhine wines, Burgundies, champagne and liqueurs; and frequent toasts to the health of the royal guests, toasts delivered in Esperanto, the international language cradled at Geneva, of which Farnham understood no word.

Carlotta had taken complete possession of him again and since she was brazenly intent on breaking down Farnham's reserve tonight, he was kept at his wits' end, parrying her advances without making himself openly offensive to her.

"Monsieur, you are the first man that ever dare treat Carlotta like she is the rug of the Turk under your feet," she exclaimed hotly, as they sat on the moonlit terrace outside after dinner. "Is it that I am so ver' distasteful to you, monsieur?"

"The very opposite, señora," he said politely. "But I must not let myself forget that you have drunk much champagne tonight and are not quite yourself."

"So, I am the infant in arms, you think, monsieur, yes? Well, I will tell you, then. The wine it have not affect me; it is my heart that have spoken to you. But I will not throw myself at your feet, monsieur!"

She covered her face with her hands and sat in silence for a full minute, then got up abruptly. Farnham arose quickly and faced indoors in mute indication that he was ready to go in.

Señora Quarazza gave an exclamation of sharp disgust.

"Pardon, monsieur," she said in a caustic drawl. "I will find for you Mademoiselle Le Rivet!"

For the better part of half an hour Farnham loitered about the reception room, alone and very uncomfortable, since no one paid the slightest attention to him. The guests were scattered about the château, chatting in convivial groups. When the Spanish woman finally reappeared, Farnham caught the welcome sight of Mademoiselle Le Rivet beside her. Carlotta had put aside her pique and her dark eyes were flashing in friendly high spirits again. Mademoiselle Le Rivet, he saw, was pale and ill at ease.

"I have forgive you, you ver' bad man, for being so rude," exclaimed Carlotta. "And I have brought the wonderful news. Gizele, who knows everybody, have arranged it with Baron Oberhelfenschwil. You are to sit at the gaming table with—ah, but you can never guess?"

"With the baron?" suggested Farnham.

Carlotta gave a disdainful shrug.

"With his Highness, Abbas Hilmi, the Khedive of Egypt."

Farnham stood blinking for a moment.

"That would be wonderful," he said dryly. "But, as you saw last night, I do not know the first thing about playing baccarat—not even how to place my bet."

"It is not baccarat the gentlemen play tonight for Abbas," exclaimed Carlotta. "It is the great game of the Americans, the game you speak of yourself last night, monsieur—pokair."

"You mean the khedive is sitting in at a game of poker?" Farnham stammered. He thought a moment and laughed. "I don't imagine I could muster francs enough to ante with in such a game. Besides, it would be *lèse majesté* to hold aces against a king, wouldn't it?"

The Spanish woman caught him by the arm, while Mademoiselle Le Rivet stood by in thoughtful silence.

"Come, Gizele's baron waits to present monsieur, the American, to defend the honor of his country in the international game!" exclaimed Carlotta. "The ten thousand francs, it is sufficient."

Farnham, against his protestations, was escorted upstairs, the señora meeting his fears of the size of the game with the deft argument that he need risk even less than that at baccarat the Friday before. Mademoiselle Le Rivet left them at the stairway, saying she must inquire after the health of an officer lately arrived from Constantinople. Carlotta leaned heavily upon him as they mounted the stairway, almost drunkenly.

"A few minutes, monsieur, long enough to say you have played with a king," she told him. "Yes, a king who will sit again at Cairo before so ver' long. His Excellency, Count Kulm, will attend to that, monsieur."

"A great man, Abbas," said Farnham softly. "But has not the great count made a grave mistake in giving Abbas precedence over the Russian grand duke tonight, señora? It has puzzled me, but perhaps you can make the reason clear if there is one."

She snapped her fingers again.

"That for the grand duke!" she cried. "Have I not heard it said what shall happen to the grand duke? That wretch Lenine has bit the hand of his Excellency, the hand that fed him, monsieur, and so the grand duke loses his power to the rabbles. His Excellency always knows who is—"

Señora Quarazza broke off sharply, in the sudden realization that her tongue was loose, and cast a quick, apprehensive glance at Farnham. He was looking straight ahead, politely interested.

"If the cards are only lucky tonight," he said, "wouldn't it be wonderful to say that I had beaten the khedive at poker?"

"*Madre de Dios!*" Carlotta swore with a laugh in which there was a sigh of relief. "It might be a king's ransom you would win in Swiss francs, monsieur!"

The shining bald pate and bespangled Honved cavalry uniform of Von Oberhelfenschwil, the baron, loomed in a nearby alcove as they came to the lounging hall. He acknowledged Señora Quarazza with the merest nod of his head,

ignored Farnham, and marched stiffly ahead of them in the manner of a man who performs a disagreeable function that is far beneath his dignity. Half a dozen men were seated at a round poker table in the baccarat room, conspicuous among them the fezzed and stone faced Abbas, nonchalantly intent upon a game of stud poker. Baron Oberhelfenschwil mouthed a dry presentation of Farnham, indicated a vacant chair and turned away. The khedive, hunched into a stolid little ball of a man, lifted two bloodshot, dead eyes momentarily.

"Upon my word," he commented, in the boorish sneer of a man who need give no thought to the sensibilities of others.

Farnham flushed crimson, sat down rather awkwardly and accepted from the banker a small pile of octagonal baccarat markers that were in use as poker chips. While the others played out a hand, he looked about surreptitiously at the other players. Two obese, elderly men in lurid uniforms of ancient vintage, three somewhat younger men in civilian evening clothes, all square of head, gloomy of face, emotionless, expressionless. The man who banked the game was a young, very swarthy man whom Farnham recognized as the one who cut the khedive's meat for him at the Beau Rivage. The aide was not playing.

THE FEW words spoken were in English, terms of the game. When they addressed one another at length, it was in French, the usual language of Geneva. Half a dozen women stood over the players, or sat craning their necks at the play. Señora Quarazza had a major-domo place a chair for her close at Farnham's side and sat down, now quite subdued.

"A thousand francs," said Abbas, tossing a single marker into the center of the table to start the play at the next hand.

His up card was a jack, and high. The others called. Farnham had a ten spot up, another ten down. He hesitated long enough to make a hurried calculation. At a thousand francs a card, it would take half his ten thousand francs to see the hand through. He tossed in a chip.

Abbas was high on the next hand with a king. He tossed in another thousand-franc marker. The others saw it, including Farnham. On the third exposed card, Farnham's heart thumped joyously. His third ten fell, two in sight, one down. He bet one chip.

"Up two," grunted Abbas when the play reached him, tossing three markers out indifferently.

All saw the raise. When the final card was dropped, Farnham saw instantly that he held the winning hand. He bet two thousand francs. All called him except Abbas who pushed in a high stack of markers.

"Up twenty," he muttered.

The others cast their hands aside. Farnham shoved in his remaining three markers.

"I'll call your Highness for what I have in front of me," he said.

The khedive exposed a second king, and cast his hand into the deck. Farnham took three chips from the pile of twenty and pushed the other seventeen back to the royal person. The khedive ignored them, and his aide promptly shoved them to Farnham.

"Your hand was high," he said in English.

"But I did not have the seventeen chips covered," explained Farnham.

The banker shrugged; the next hand went on. The incident was closed. Luck ran with Farnham. In half an hour of play he had accumulated a reserve of forty markers. Señora Quarazza had left her chair suddenly some time before, at the whispered summons of a mjaor-domo. Until she returned or the game broke up, he knew that he could hardly withdraw, a heavy winner.

Aces back to back came to him while his luck was at its high tide. He bet one marker. Abbas raised him three. The khedive had a six spot showing and Farnham concluded that he must have a pair of sixes. On the next card, Abbas

drew a deuce, Farnham a queen. Farnham's next card was a jack. Abbas showed a three spot. On the final card, Abbas paired his exposed deuce; Farnham got another queen. Aces up against sixes on deuces, he decided, and bet a stack of ten markers.

Abbas had made all his bets without hesitation. He did not hesitate now. Into the center of the table he pushed his entire reserve, a large jumble of markers. The banker counted them and announced the total. Ninety thousand francs.

Farnham swallowed hard. Twenty-two thousand dollars on the turn of a card. An extravagant play even for an exiled khedive. The pay and allowances of an American captain for six years. Farnham debated the elements of probability, his own accumulation of chips. The khedive's play had all the elements of a monumental bluff. Abbas might have been going through on an ace in the hole, or a pair of sixes. There was the possibility of three deuces, Farnham saw. But that seemed unlikely. Abbas would hardly have raised with a small teaser bet at the first card if he had nothing better than a deuce in the hole, under an exposed six spot.

"I'll see you for what I have in front of me," Farnham finally decided, slowly counting out his forty-seven markers.

The khedive flipped over his hole card, a deuce. Three deuces; the winning hand. Abbas rose from the table and waddled from the room with a grunted adieu. His aide, the banker, set about cashing the chips, first making out a slip showing the standing of each player, the amount owed or owing. Farnham's tab called for a difference of forty-two thousand francs.

"But, monsieur," he gasped, "I called his Highness' bet for only what I had in front of me, which is the rule of table stakes!"

In vain he argued with the khedive's aide. The aide was adamant. Had not monsieur accepted his Highness' markers for double the size of his own bet earlier in the game? That was the rule among gentlemen. They bet what they liked, within the limits of their means.

"If monsieur is embarrassed for the moment," the aide said finally, as if to close a disagreeable scene, "I will call at his hotel tomorrow for the sum. A statement, please, on monsieur's card."

Farnham saw the futility of debate. He knew that he could not pay the amount, either now or tomorrow. A scene at such a place was impossible. A solemn major-domo was standing close to him, waiting for his ear. He took from his purse the ten thousand francs that represented his initial stack, and scrawled on the back of his personal card an I.O.U. for the remaining thirty-two thousand francs.

"At eleven o'clock of the morning, I will call at monsieur's hotel," said the aide stiffly.

Farnham made no reply. His throat was parched. There was nothing more to say. At least he had escaped the immediate humiliation of his unhappy plight. The major-domo leaned close and whispered in his ear. Monsieur's presence was desired in another room of the château.

Farnham followed the gilded functionary through interminable halls and lounging rooms to a door at the extreme end of a great wing of the château. The major-domo ceremoniously opened a door, stood aside for Farnham to enter and closed the door softly behind him.

In the room was a man of middle age, in a gorgeous diplomatic uniform of purple with red and gilt facings, numerous strands of gold aiguillettes and a cluster of decorations. The man was standing with his arms folded, in a pose of exaggerated dignity. His face was long, dark skinned and deeply clouded by whatever passion devoured him, the lift of his long blunt nose and his thick black brows giving the expression of a man who is offended by some disagreeable odor. Farnham, despite the stress of the past few minutes, felt a smile struggling at his lips as he regarded the fellow. But when the man spoke, his amusement vanished instantly.

"I am the Señor Don Ricardo Murilla Quarazza," he announced frigidly, in excellent English, drawing himself up with a muster of all his outraged dignity. "You will to me give the complete satisfaction, monsieur?"

"I don't believe I understand exactly what you are driving at, señor," said Farnham, at the end of several moments of puzzled gaping.

Señor Don Ricardo strode close to Farnham and glared into his eyes.

"Señora have told me everything which I have suspect!" he said and with an indescribably quick movement struck Farnham flush in the face with his dress gloves.

Farnham felt the surge of hot blood to his face, but held himself in check with an effort.

"If you feel that way about it, my good fellow," he said through tight lips, "and can dig up a couple of guns, I'll accommodate you here and now!"

"As the one so grossly aggrieved," sneered Don Ricardo, "it is I who claims the choice of weapons under the code of gentlemen. It shall be with the sabers of cavalry. My second, he will arrange with you, monsieur, the details tomorrow at eleven at the hotel Beau Rivage."

CHAPTER VII

LEGATION MAIL BAGS

A PERSISTENT tapping at his door in the Beau Rivage awakened Farnham from a heavy sleep the next morning. He sat up slowly, shook his head vigorously in an effort to orient himself, yawned and got up.

"Yes, yes," he exclaimed in annoyance when the rapping continued. "You needn't hammer the door down."

He looked at his watch, saw that it was nine o'clock, and lazily drew on his trousers. He had intended sleeping until ten, since it had been daybreak when he reached the Beau Rivage from the château of Von Kulm, and thereafter he had seen the sun over the Alps while he sat poring over the night's adventures. He supposed it was a *garçon* at the door, possibly one with a telegram, an answer to the message he had wired from the post office the evening before. As for the two critical visitors whom he was scheduled to meet this morning, they were not due for another two hours.

He opened the door finally to find not a flunky but the placid, pink mask of Monsieur Za, of the House of Sigriswiller. The man of abbreviated name and stature uttered a polite good morning, bowed easily, without his customary apologies, and handed Farnham a large white envelop.

"I say, Monsieur Za," Farnham complained, "isn't this carrying business enterprise a bit too far? It was bad enough form for you to break in on my dinner the other evening, but when it comes to hammering me out of my sleep—"

"Will monsieur please read," Za interrupted, at the same time entering the room without an invitation and closing the door behind him.

Farnham glanced at the linen envelop and saw that in the upper left hand corner there was an embossed coat of arms and coronet. He tore the envelop open with quiet deliberation and read with a swiftly mounting pulse:

> Monsieur Edouard Farnham, Hotel Beau Rivage, Geneva.
>
> Sir: His Excellency, the Count Kulm, have learned with a most profound regret and humiliation, the unhappy occurrence of last night which occur at his château. In view of the deep embarrassments as affecting his most honorable and important guests, his Excellency, upon becoming familiar with all the circumstances, command of me that I transmit hereunto attached, a cheque in the amount of Fr. 42,000, which I believe cover the transaction in full. With this cheque, monsieur, you will be prepared to pay to the representative of his Highness, Abbas Hilmi, the sum due him in notes of the Swiss republic, at eleven o'clock of this day. At your pleasure, if you wish and find yourself in a position to do so, you may refund the amount to his excellency's treasury.
>
> The Master of the Household,
>
> —M. BOLIN

There fluttered to the floor, out of the folds of the letter, a large green check. Farnham reached down for it and studied

it for some time in thoughtful silence. It was drawn on the bank of Geneva in the full sum indicated in Bolin's letter, the amount of his own loss in addition to the sum for which the khedive's aide de camp would call at eleven o'clock.

"I'm—I'm really grateful for this favor," Farnham stammered, meeting Za's superior gaze in evident embarrassment. "You see, monsieur, there was a slight misunderstanding and—"

"But yes, monsieur," drawled Za. "A more fortunate misunderstanding, perhaps, if the chances of play had fallen differently."

Farnham stiffened at the affront.

"I presume, monsieur," he said coolly, "that I am for the moment in no position to resent affronts. I will accept the count's check under the—the circumstances. But I did not know you were reduced to the messenger service, monsieur. Do not let me detain you, if you have finished your errand."

"But there is another matter," said Za. His eyes glowed amusement at Farnham's observation. "Monsieur will require an identification at the bank, and it is my instructions to attend to that. I will wait, monsieur, until you are dressed. Also, it is the desire of his Excellency that you return to me his letter, as you can appreciate his wish to escape any embarrassment."

Farnham debated this for some moments, then surrendered the letter. Za folded it carefully, placed it in his pocketbook and moved to seat himself.

"I will be down presently." Farnham dismissed his caller.

"For a man in your unhappy predicament, you are most insolent, monsieur, to those who try to serve you," the little man observed icily.

"If I am mistaken in treating you as a mere messenger, please correct me," said Farnham.

But Za offered no correction. His eyes sparkled again, mischievously, Farnham thought. He left with an exaggerated bow. Farnham dressed without haste, had his breakfast sent up to him and finally went downstairs soon after ten o'clock, to find Za pacing the corridor restlessly. The fellow led the way to an awaiting horsecab, drove to the bank without speaking and verified the American's indorsement to Bolin's check.

The money was paid to Farnham in Swiss banknotes of large denomination. He was folding the notes in his pocketbook when Za intervened.

"A matter of ten thousand francs, monsieur, you are to refund to me for his Excellency," he volunteered.

"Certainly," agreed Farnham. "I will pay it promptly, to anyone having a letter of authority to receive it."

"As you please," said Za. "We will discuss that later. But in the meantime, monsieur, I have another matter of pressing importance that must be adjusted, if you will be good enough to return to the Beau Rivage where we may be alone."

"You seem to have quite an interest in my affairs," bristled Farnham. "For all I know, you are presuming rather strongly on the fact that you came to my rooms as a mere messenger."

"But I am convinced, monsieur," said Za, unruffled, "that very soon we shall be much better acquainted."

Farnham looked nervously at his watch. The time was twenty minutes to eleven. By the time they were back in his rooms at the Beau Rivage, ten minutes remained until his interview not merely with the khedive's aide de camp, but with Señor Quarazza's personal representative.

"Make it brief, Za," he cautioned. "I've got a very important engagement in exactly ten minutes."

"It is that," said the little man, "that unhappy affair I wish first to discuss with you. A duel with Señor Don Ricardo Quarazza is fatal, monsieur. As the one whose honor has been aggrieved he has the choice of weapons under the code of Spain. As a swordsman he has no equals, I have reason to know."

"Under the American code," retorted Farnham, "I have the right to laugh at his challenge. Duels have been out of

date in my country for the past hundred years."

"But you are not in your country, monsieur," Za reminded him. "And you might not be very welcome there if you attempt to return."

"Just what do you mean by that, please?"

"You were sent here on a mission, monsieur. Instead of attending strictly to that mission, you have outraged the honor of a neutral official of high caste, you have outraged the hospitality of a distinguished Swiss gentleman, you have offended the khedive; and such conduct is not considered lightly in matters of international courtesy. Your own country would not dare back such insolence on the part of one of its official representatives."

"Is the representative of a firm of jewelers, here to buy wares, a representative of his country?" Farnham inquired with an unconcerned smile.

Za lighted a cigar and regarded Farnham sharply.

"But yes, monsieur," he said dryly. "When that firm is the United States Army and the representative holds ranks as a captain of Signal Corps, my dear Captain Farnham."

Farnham jumped impulsively to his feet.

"Who told you that?" he demanded.

"If I had the slightest doubt, your own actions now confirm it," Za smiled. "But I have known as much from the first." He puffed serenely at his cigar and motioned the pale and unstrung American back into his seat. "But please to calm yourself, my Captain," he added. "We have many matters yet to discuss, not the least of which is just how to extricate you from your immediate unpleasant situation with Señor Quarazza."

Captain Farnham had begun a restless pacing of the room, his face drawn, his eyes staring and haggard. He stopped suddenly in front of Monsieur Za.

"But how do I know who you are, or what authority you have to discuss my private affairs?" he cried. "Who are you if we are to talk further?"

A KNOCK at the door interrupted. Farnham glanced at his wristwatch and saw that it was eleven o'clock; he groaned aloud. He opened the door tremulously, a man who has suddenly lost his nerve. It was Abbas' aide. Farnham quickly drew forth the Swiss notes and counted out the sum due the khedive with nervous fingers. The aide bowed and left without speaking. The door was no sooner closed than there was another knock. Farnham opened it upon a tall, cadaverous man of distinctly Spanish caste.

"Pardon, monsieur," said the visitor, fixing Farnham with a level, unfriendly stare, "but have I the honor of addressing Monsieur Farnham?"

"Yes, I—I happen to be he," affirmed Farnham uneasily. "Is there something?"

"I am the Señor Devero," said the Spaniard, "the personal friend of Señor Don Ricardo Murilla Quarazza. Will monsieur speak for himself or is there some one to whom he would entrust the details?"

Farnham hesitated, shifted from one foot to the other, and ran his hand through his hair nervously.

"Yes, I'll speak for myself," he decided. "There will be no details to arrange. I have no grievance against the señor, and he has no cause for grievance against me."

Señor Devero drew himself up to his full height and folded his arms.

"Monsieur astound me," he sneered. "Señor Quarazza say to me that he have struck Monsieur Farnham in the face with his glove and monsieur offer to fight with the pistols. But it is the señor's choice of weapons, and today, this very day before the sun is set, the señor's honor must have the satisfaction."

"Yes, there's some truth to that," said Farnham in a show of spirit. "It was his good luck I didn't bowl him over with my fist, but I remembered I was a guest at Kulm's château. As for mixing swords with some transient Spaniard, I have neither time nor inclination for such ridiculous nonsense!"

The Spaniard's eyes blazed a withering contempt.

"Very well, monsieur," he rejoined. "It shall be the privilege of Señor Quarazza to demand the satisfaction of the American minister at Berne."

Za rose suddenly and stepped forward.

"You will permit me to set this matter at ease, Señor Devero," he said with decision. "Monsieur Farnham is entirely right in his contention. There must be no duel, since his Excellency, the Count Kulm, desires that there be no trouble. That being the case, I wish your assurance, also, that no complaint will be made to the American minister."

Señor Quarazza's somber friend underwent an instant transformation. His head dropped from the frigid heights into a bow of ready acquiescence.

"If such is the wish of his Excellency," said the Spaniard, "I will speak for Señor Quarazza and say that the matter is at an end."

"Of course," Za insinuated, "if his Excellency should change his mind at any time, I will promptly advise with you."

"That is most gracious of you, my good friend," responded Devero, dipping his long lean figure to Za and taking his departure.

Za faced Farnham with gloating assurance as they were left alone.

"Does the Captain need further evidence of my authority?" he inquired. "You have seen that at my word of command you are rescued from the most serious of difficulties. The duel, it mean death; the complaint of Señor Quarazza to your minister it mean the great embarrassment to your Government, the disgrace for you. *Voilà!*"

Farnham was badly shaken again. He sat staring dumbly at Monsieur Za for some time before he pulled himself together.

"Accept my apology and my gratitude," he said in a thin voice. "But you have not told me the reason for your good offices. Or am I indebted solely to the high sense of hospitality of the count—"

"You may thank the noble nature of his Excellency, my Captain," replied Za. He straightened in his chair and became very business-like as he took a pack of folded sheets from his pocket. "There is the most trivial return that you can make. Let us waste no time, my Captain. It is desired merely that you send these letters."

Farnham took one of the letters gingerly and as he read his brows met in bewilderment. It was a few words of harmless greeting to an American M. P. corporal at Paris. The missive read:

> Dear Corporal: Here I am in Switzerland. A wonderful place is Geneva with its painted lakes and picture mountains. I only wish all of my good friends could come up here and take in the sights. How are things going in Paris? Sincerely, and in great haste,
>
> —EDWARD FARNHAM, Capt. S.C., U.S. Army.

He took the other sheets up, one at a time, and read them eagerly. The wording was practically the same on all. There were twenty sheets in the collection, letters addressed to French civilians, and occasionally to an American soldier, in many parts of France.

"I see no point to these things," said Farnham. He looked narrowly at Za and added in sudden suspicion, "Unless it is some sort of a secret code, in which case I most emphatically will have nothing to do with them."

"Ah, but if the Captain has doubts," said Za, "he may write his own letters in his own way."

"You mean write anything I want to say, in my own way, and nothing will be added to what I write, or no changes made?" Farnham inquired incredulously.

"But yes, my Captain. Exactly. Each day you will write what you wish—twenty letters. The secretary of his Excellency shall type them in your exact words and they shall come to you, who will sign them, seal the envelopes and place them in the mail with your own hands."

"But I can't see why you do not perform that service for yourselves, monsieur. Surely the mails are free out of Geneva into France."

"To you, my Captain, it may sound most strange, but to his Excellency, who have great holdings abroad in many lands, it shall be of great value. He shall know that your letters, they shall not be tampered with, or taken from the mails, never to be delivered."

Za drew his chair closer and leaned forward, as Farnham sat wrapped in perplexed indecision.

"It is, monsieur, that the Captain's letters are not disturbed by prying eyes of the French," he whispered, "since they will bear the seal of your legation, and go to Paris in the diplomatic pouch that is immune from censors."

In the long silence that ensued, Za sat twisting his fingers, his eyes alert and catlike as he watched the play of Farnham's features while the American paced the floor in an agony of uncertainty.

"Come, it is little enough to ask?" Za prompted him at the end of several minutes. "Captain Farnham must not forget that he is not in a position to be—disagreeable."

"Yes, you needn't shove that at me," cried Farnham in despair. "I realize it only too well."

"Then your answer, my Captain—?"

Farnham sank back into his chair, faced Za and nodded his head in helpless surrender.

"All right," he said weakly. "It sounds harmless enough—and I'll do as you wish."

CHAPTER VIII

AN ORDER IN CIPHER

COLONEL RAND had relegated the last of the day's reports and routine papers to competent assistants and sat, his feet comfortably a-slant on his broad headquarters desk, serenely absorbed in the European edition of the London *Daily Mail*. He smiled as his eye fell upon the old familiar heading on the English officer casualty report:

2nd lieutenants unless otherwise indicated.

There was, to Colonel Rand, a grim humor in that heading. He had a habit of counting the printed exceptions. There were very few today. Two captains, one major. All the other casualties were lieutenants as usual. It served to remind the colonel that fighting was the business of junior officers, of youngsters, and the reflection bolstered him against an uncomfortable itching to be in the field with troops. In his twenty years of Army Service, the colonel had always commanded troops; in Cuba, in the Philippines, in China, in Mexico just before the war. He had never got quite used to the idea of a headquarters berth, into which he had been pitchforked without his knowledge or consent, to ride herd on German spies, the very existence of which he had only vaguely suspected before his arrival overseas some months before. But then, he always reasoned, some one had to draw that berth in a hastily formed Army that had to feel its way as it went.

A trim sergeant-major interrupted the colonel's reading.

"Sir," said the sergeant, "the private wire to Paris is being connected with the Colonel's office. It is for the Colonel personally, sir."

"All right, Sergeant, close the doors," said Rand.

He lowered his feet slowly, one at a time, from the desk top, and reached for the receiver on his desk phone while his eyes clung to the newspaper. There was nothing in Paris, so far as he knew, that was of critical interest at the present moment. Perhaps a D. C. I. operative, or the French, calling him up on some incidental matter.

He placed the receiver to his ear abstractedly.

"Hello, Rand speaking," he said absently.

The next moment he sat abruptly upright, like a man who has received a heavy voltage of electricity. His face became suddenly livid.

"Who? Who?" he demanded, as if unwilling to believe what he heard. "Elton?

Why, confound it man, you can't mean it that you're in Paris!"

"Flying up to headquarters after dinner, sir, and would like to see the Colonel if convenient," said the voice at the Paris end.

"But, but—do you mean you've finished up your job already over in—"

Rand cast a quick look about the room, saw that the door was closed and finished the sentence.

"— in Switzerland?" he demanded.

"Just in yesterday from London, sir. Haven't been to Switzerland as yet," reported Elton.

The discipline of twenty years was lost in the explosion that shook Colonel Rand.

"Haven't — been — in — Switzerland!" he raged. "And it's over two weeks since you—you left here under my orders to go there. Rank disobedience, Captain. Disobedience! I'll try you for that! Dammit, man, you're making a monkey out of my office and I'll not put up with it. Didn't I tell you that was the most important case we ever had on our hands? Didn't I tell you—"

The colonel broke off in the impotence of his rage and hammered the top of the desk with his free hand.

"But I've made most important progress, sir," said Elton calmly, when something of the storm had passed. "I can give the Colonel a satisfactory explanation, I'm sure."

"There's no explanation on earth that excuses a direct, flagrant violation of orders! I sent you to Switzerland, and if you haven't been there I'm going to know why."

"Very good, sir, will the Colonel be in his office at ten o'clock tonight?"

"I will!" shouted Rand, and slammed up the receiver.

When Captain Elton arrived at headquarters a few minutes before ten, he found his chief seated at his desk, wrapped in austere silence. The colonel continued to glare at him ominously as the young officer stood waiting for his senior to speak.

"Well?" The colonel scowled.

"The British came through with what I went after," said Elton. "Also I got some unexpected information at the French Bureau, and an extraordinary piece of good luck quite on the side."

"You left here two weeks ago with orders taking you to Switzerland," said Rand uncompromisingly.

"There was no date implicitly stated, sir," explained Elton. "I'll admit freely that the Colonel was so insistent on having me start, that I may have left the impression I was going to Switzerland."

"When higher authority learns that I have no operatives in Switzerland after nearly three weeks, sir," Rand said incisively, "my position will be rather embarrassing, to say the least."

Elton helped himself to a seat and lighted a cigaret.

"Sir, the Colonel must permit me to speak frankly," he said quietly. "If I am expected to get results on a case involving what we believe to be the cream of the Prussian secret service, it can hardly be expected that I can reach them by going supinely to Berne or Geneva and inserting an advertisement in the Swiss newspapers."

"Inferring what?"

"That the Colonel has got to back me up in handling this case my own way, without too much impatience. I have reason to believe, sir, that I've accomplished a great deal to date. It may be just optimism, but I see the chance of setting a net that may reach over several continents before we get through with this case, sir; a flush roundup of Boche operatives, in fact, that may ruin the German secret service organization!"

"Your reason for that remarkable statement, sir!"

"Confidentially," explained Elton, "I've gotten from the British Intelligence at London some confirmation of our suspicions that Wilhelmstrasse is centering its secret service in Switzerland on a large scale. Also, from my friend Lieutenant d'Auteuil of the French secret service, I've gotten something even more important—a means of effecting contact

with an operative they have in Switzerland. While the French have just started work on the Von Kulm case, contact with their service may prove of great value. D'Auteuil even hinted at a spy double, a Russian, who ought to be able to give me a great lift if I can get wind of him when I cross the frontier."

Rand unbent slightly and leaned back in his chair to light a cigar. The captain took a letter from his pocket and passed it across the table.

"Also, sir," he added, "through a bit of rare good fortune, I've gotten my hands on this little document from Geneva."

Colonel Rand studied the letter, turned it over, adjusted his glasses and read it again with knitted brows. The letter was addressed to Corporal Emanuel Vaud, American Military Police, Rue St. Anne, Paris, and read:

> My dear Corporal Vaud: I am having a pleasant time of it here in Geneva. The scenery is wonderful. Too bad the whole A. E. F. can't come up here and bask in the Alpine glow, not to mention the Kursaal and the Casino. Give my regards to mutual friends as you see them. Very sincerely yours,
>
> —EDWARD FARNHAM, Capt. S.C., U.S.A.

"I see nothing in this," said Rand, glancing up sharply. "It doesn't even read as if it might be code."

"It isn't, sir. But I suspect it is going to be a mighty interesting document. I'll ask the Colonel to inspect it again tomorrow. And now may I ask the Colonel to excuse me? I wish to give Sergeant Walters some detailed instructions, if I may have his services for the next few weeks; and then I have another matter that will take all night, if not several nights."

"All right," Rand assented grudgingly. He rose slowly and took up his cap. "But tomorrow you'll be at the end of your rope, Elton, unless you can show better cause than I've seen tonight for staying out of Switzerland so infernally long. Good night, sir!"

Thank you, sir—good night, sir."

Elton could not restrain a smile as he turned away from the colonel's desk.

IN THE outer office the faithful Sergeant Walters was waiting in a fever of restlessness. At a nod from Elton, the sergeant followed to the captain's office far down the stone corridor, entered, and stood expectantly while Elton switched on the light.

"You have a keen nose, Sergeant," Elton greeted his assistant in many a past operation against the German secret service. "It takes intuition to sense that I was going to want you tonight, and be right here handy this way."

"Sure, sir, it isn't that," said the veteran non-com. "For two weeks I've been hanging close to the office, like a fly outside the mess hall, waiting to get in on the game. When I saw the Cap'n take off in a plane I knew there was something in the air. What's been fretting me is whether I get in on it this time, sir."

Elton sat for some time looking at Walters, the suggestion of a smile on his face. His eyes were fixed not upon the sergeant's square, wind burned face with its small grayish green eyes and straight lined, friendly face, but upon the first of his five service ribbons; the blue one with the tiny white stars stamped in its fabric.

"You've never told me, Walters," he said softly, "how you came by the Medal of Honor. I don't want to be personal, but I've been wanting to ask you about that for a long time."

Walters blinked rapidly, the blood mounting his cheeks as he shifted uncomfortably on his feet.

"Sure, sir, just a bit of good luck, and that's all," he replied. "If the Cap'n insists, I'll tell him. We was down in Jolo riding herd on a bunch of Moros, and since the U. S. had bought off the Sultan of Sulu for cash, we wasn't expecting any trouble. One morning a flock of four *juramentados* run in on us while the troop was at setting up exercises just after reveille. It was so quick and sudden that everybody couldn't do nothing but bolt out of the way. I was standing alongside the cap'n and saw the whole Moro quartet come down at him, swinging their

krises like lunatics. All I did, sir, was the only thing I could do under the circumstances. I had my pistol, and I got it into action. Six shots did the trick, which was luck enough, as that was all I had in my gun."

"And they gave you a Medal of Honor for that, eh?" smiled Elton.

"Nobody was more surprised than me that I got it, Cap'n," said Walters. "Why, it wasn't even good pistol marksmanship. I was firing at that close range, a recruit couldn't hardly miss, but I made one low three at four o'clock, clear down on the rascal's neck. But the other four was clean bull's-eyes, square through the head."

"Thank you for telling me about it, Walters," said Elton. "But getting back to business, I'm sending you to Switzerland at once, and while there are no *juramentados* in that sweetly peaceful neutral land, it might be well to take your Service pistol along."

"Thanks," grinned Walters. "I always feel sort of undressed when I have to leave my sidearms home."

Elton sketched in Walters' further instructions rapidly.

"You can take Corporal Sands along. Get him out of the motor pool, but with nothing bigger than a motorcycle and sidecar. Convince him he's deaf and dumb until he gets back to headquarters again. Have him drive you to Bonne, near the Franco-Swiss frontier, where you'll leave him to hang around a few days and then have him go on into Thonon, on Lake Geneva, French side, where he'll wait for you to show up. You'd better arrange a secret meeting place where you can get together outside of Thonon by night. From Bonne, you make your own way into Thonon, alone, the best way you can. Wear civilian clothes, which you may take along in a bundle in the sidecar, changing out of your uniform only after you have separated from Sands. In Thonon, it'll be up to you to arrange for some rascally Frenchman or Swiss to slip you up the lake by motorboat by night and into Geneva. Do you follow me?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"Once in Geneva, you can let it drop that you're an American deserter with a dark past. But don't impart much information. Your only job will be to stay around Geneva, establish some means of returning to Thonon, and hang around the Kursaal of nights. You'll have no trouble finding that place. It's expensive, but I'll see that you are given a good bundle of francs for expenses. Be sure to go to the Kursaal by the east entrance, at nine o'clock each night."

"Yes, sir."

"One thing more," Elton concluded. "As you come to the Kursaal entrance, light a cigar. That's important."

The sergeant drew himself up at attention. A score of questions might have surged from some men's lips. How was he to find Bonne and Thonon? Was it certain that a boat could be arranged for? What was the purpose of all his movements, what was the game in which he was playing this part?

"Was there anything further, sir?" Walters asked quietly.

"No, that's all. A pleasant junket."

"Very good, sir, and thank you."

AS SERGEANT WALTERS strode smartly from the room, Elton went to his wall locker, got out a deep metal tray, filled it with an acrid smelling chemical and submerged Captain Farnham's innocent appearing letter in the fluid. A few minutes of this treatment and the blank surfaces of the letter began to mottle with vague, yellowish marks. A bath in a second tray, and the marks became distinct rows of figures, filling in the spaces between typewritten lines, the margins, the entire lower part of the paper under Farnham's signature.

With the aid of a strong glass, Elton copied these arrays of numerals on to a clean sheet of paper. They were set in unequal blocks of figures, probably representing words, the length of the message testifying to its probable importance. Elton sat back and surveyed the first line with despair:

741338 8296336764429216 77557236
1866 722818824225 7838 964434541365

These figures symbolized letters. Either each figure represented a letter of the alphabet, or each two figures, according to the secret cipher that the Germans had devised. With a message of such length to work on, the hidden meaning could not escape. It was simply a matter of searching out the secret key. Words have certain characteristics. They are made up of letters. The letter E appears more frequently than any other letter in the English language. Thereafter the high frequency letters are T, O, A, N, I, R, S, H and D in the order named. Letters that appear least often are Z, X, J, K, V, B, G. Therefore if the figure 4 or the figure 42 represent the letter E, they will be the figures to appear most often in a cipher message, and the less frequent figures will represent letters of the lower group.

First of all Elton turned to the German ciphers he had previously broken. He knew that if Geneva was using a newly devised cipher, it might be a matter of days, even weeks, before he could unravel the key, so numerous and complicated are the combinations that can be devised. Half an hour later his pulse leaped with joy. The cipher was intricate, but it was not a new one. A recurrence of the last cipher he had dealt with, in which each letter of the alphabet is represented not by one figure but by alternating figures. It responded to the following key:

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
789	A	D	G	J	M	P	S	V
123	B	E	H	K	N	Q	T	W
456	C	F	I	L	O	R	U	XYZ

Elton set to work joyously to reduce the figures to clear English, first marking them off into groups of two since each two figures represented one letter. The first figure of each set of two, he knew, referred to a figure in the deciphering key at the left of the divided alphabet. Thus 7 or 8 or 9 meant that the hidden letter was in the first row of letters and must be A, D, G, J, M, P, S, or V. The second figure placed the column, from top to bottom, and thus instantly located the particular letter intended. The figure 72 traced direct to A as did 82 or 92; and by the same rule 12, 22 or 32 meant B, 29, 39 or 19 led to W and so on through the alphabet.

Elton recognized with a grim smile the operative to whom the missive was addressed. No. 13, Baron Erich Wolf von Strindheim, head of the Prussian secret service in Paris, the coolest and most resourceful spy in France, who twice had escaped French execution by miracles.

The first group of cipher figures, stripped of its camouflage, was no less interesting:

74 13 38 82 96 33 67 64 42 92 16
G E T A M E R I C A N

77 55 72 36 18 66 72 28 18 82 42 25
P L A N T O A T T A C K

78 33 96 44 34 54 13 65
S T M I H I E L

The message thereafter, starting off with a grandiloquent statement of purpose, read:

> An urgent objective: An empire fitted to rule the world must make use of the weaknesses of its enemies. Get intimate details involving important neutral and enemy statesmen, for use in weakening their opposition when our armed forces have struck the vital blow. Similar orders go to all world capitals. Our Black Book already formidable. Victory never more certain. Will furnish you operatives soon to destroy allied ammunition plants. Good men now available and being trained. Russians. Release No. 412 to Cairo via Versailles to stir revolt. Acknowledge, using channel: Capt. Edw. Farnham, U. S. A. through American Consul at Geneva—No. 1.

Upon verifying the last letter, Elton typed, on a blank sheet of paper, a copy of Farnham's simple missive. With the aid of a yellowish fluid, he painstakingly reproduced in invisible cipher the message from Geneva to Von Strindheim. He sealed this carefully into the envelop in which it had come from Switzerland with the diplomatic pouch and put it in his

pocket. Then he hurried downstairs, awakened the sleepy enlisted chauffeur who awaited him and drove to the billet of Colonel Rand, across the village.

It was characteristic of Colonel Rand that he faced really important matters tranquilly. When he had rubbed the sleep out of his eyes, and grumbled at the annoyance of being awakened at 2 A.M., he read the deciphered message through coolly.

"This is rather worthwhile," he commented, facing Elton with level eyes. He knitted his brows over the letter again. "So the Boche have got one of their spies planted in an American captain's uniform, eh? Farnham, Farnham," he puzzled. "Isn't that the man you want to replace at Geneva?"

"Yes, sir, it looks like it," replied Elton. "But I'm hardly prepared as yet to charge that he's a German operative."

"Then how account for this invisible cipher on his personal correspondence? It looks to me like a dead open and shut case."

"But there's always the chance that he's a victim of Boche intrigue, that they've made him an entry in Von Kulm's black book."

While Colonel Rand was debating this in his own mind, Elton seized the opportunity to get under way.

"I'm sorry to have broken the Colonel's sleep," he said. "But I thought it important to lose no time. If the Colonel will only promise to have that chap Farnham relieved immediately and sent to duty in the purchasing office at Paris until I'm through in Switzerland, it will help a great deal. My guess, sir, is that his Corporal Vaud, to whom the letter is addressed, must be a plain Boche agent. But my request is that we merely transfer him to say, Marseilles, for duty, a dozen other M. P. non-coms to go with him so the move will not look suspicious. That will put Vaud out of the way. One other request, sir, is that Captain Smedley, of Military Intelligence, be sent to Paris as a corporal to report as a clerk to Farnham when he reaches Paris for station."

Elton paused and handed the colonel a typewritten sheet of paper.

"I've written it all down for you, sir," he explained.

"All right, Elton, I'm going to let you have your own way," Rand assented whole heartedly. "That cipher message convinces me you're really doing something useful on the case. But telephone me from Paris as soon as you've intercepted any more of that cipher, and keep me in touch—"

"But that will be difficult, sir," said Elton with a dry smile. "I'll only be in Paris a few minutes this time, sir. Just long enough to turn Farnham's little letter in invisible inks back to the American postal officer, and catch this morning's through express for Switzerland."

TO BE CONTINUED

A Tale of the South Seas

By CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE

AMBUSH

COLNEY turned from the veranda railing with an exclamation of relief and laid his rifle across the breakfast table. He had recognized the man coming up the beach and knew at once that there would be no necessity for the weapon.

A few minutes after daylight that morning an outrigger canoe had landed a white man on the shore of the little cove in the lee of Sloop Point, a mile from the plantation house. Then the outrigger, manned by natives, had proceeded swiftly to the northward in the direction of Kitchin Island.

"Hey, Kenlin!" called the planter sharply toward the open door, to the dim living room of the bungalow. "He's

headin' up from the beach—straight for the house here—and you got three guesses on who he is."

He kicked off his slippers, let his white clad figure slip into a canvas chair, and began to laugh with quiet mirth.

"I'll bet I'm right—he's one of Strahan's men," called a hoarse voice from one of the bedrooms off the main hall of the big bungalow.

Kenlin came hurrying out, red suspenders hanging down over his hips. He supported his drill trousers with one hand and in the other held away from him a celluloid handled razor. His face was covered with lather, and his freckled arms were bare, for he wore only a cotton singlet. He squinted down through the palm grove toward the beach.

"Hell, I'm right! That's Rand, Strahan's head man in the store!"

Colney's clipped red mustache quivered as he restrained his laughter. His pale blue eyes bored into his foreman.

"Ain't that one hell of a note?" he asked. "Does Strahan think he can put that kind of business over on me?"

Kenlin watched the visitor stride steadily up through the palm grove. It was only an hour after sunup, and it was obvious that the man who had landed from the outrigger had started straight for the plantation bungalow.

The Malay cook came pattering along the matting with a fresh pot of hot coffee, set it before his master on the table, and departed. Colney helped himself to a cup, and drank hastily.

"Strahan must think I was born yesterday, to send Rand over here on the sly and land him like that, and think I'd fall for it."

Kenlin jerked his head so swiftly toward his employer that strips of lather flicked to the matting.

"I ain't so sure you've got it doped right, boss," he objected.

"Why ain't I right?" demanded Colney.

"If Strahan was to send Rand here to make trouble, why'd Rand run past here before daylight in his outrigger. He could've come straight in here behind the reef on the way from Partoolen Island."

"Because Rand didn't want to be seen at all, that's why," said Colney. "He was a little late at Sloop Point, and the sun caught him. Prob'ly had sense enough to know we'd spotted him there, so he comes along to put as good a face on things as he can."

"Rand's got his gall, I'll say that for him," said Kenlin. "To come marchin' up to us like that, after a sneak ashore at the point."

"He's just as crooked as Strahan—and Strahan's so crooked he'd rather go in a circle than a straight line, any time."

Kenlin shook his head doubtfully.

"I ain't so sure that was one of Strahan's outriggers he come in."

"You know it was," insisted Colney. "That patched sail—I'd know the boat ten mile off."

The planter got to his feet and paced the veranda, watching Rand draw nearer. At times Colney squinted his eyes against the strong morning sunlight to the southeast, where Partoolen Island showed as a bluish smudge against the sea's horizon. The great atoll where Captain Strahan had his trading station and copra plantation was also marked in the blue of the sky overhead by a faintly luminous disk—the lagoon blink, which was the reflection upward of the smooth water enclosed by the atoll, catching the sunlight like a gigantic mirror.

"Just the same, boss," Kenlin objected, "seems to me Strahan would know better'n to send Rand here if it was an underhand game."

"You mean he'd send somebody who's a stranger to us?"

"It'd be more sense. Strahan's been havin' trouble with Rand, I hear. Rand's been drinkin'—I told you that a month ago when I come back from Partoolen after tryin' to find why the *Belleflower* didn't come to load your copra. There's bad blood between Strahan and Rand."

"What they fed to you at Strahan's might be a put-up job," said Colney. "Anyhow, we'll hear what kind of a song

and dance Rand's got to hand us before very long."

"Well, he ain't afraid of us," commented Kenlin. "He's comin' right to headquarters, and he don't expect to git shot by the way he's humpin' along."

"What he's got to say," Colney went on, "is most likely put into his mouth by Strahan. And I'll bet it's a message to me that when Deputy Commissioner Corcoran shows up, I don't need to make any application for the tradin' rights here to compete with Partoolen. Strahan's got a tip that when his concession expires next year, I'm goin' to make a stab at gittin' it for myself."

"Yes, that may be what Rand's come to say," admitted Kenlin. "Anyhow, Corcoran's due in a couple of weeks."

"I've got a hunch Corcoran's already arrived at Strahan's," said Colney. "And you might as well keep out of sight when Rand gits here; he'll shoot off his face plainer, mebbe, if you ain't in sight. Let him think he's got only me to talk to, and no witnesses. You can listen inside."

Kenlin, with an assent to the plan, disappeared into the bungalow. Tinny sounds from wash basins and the stropping of a razor told that he was finishing his shaving. He was the only white man employed on Valean Island, where the planter leased the buildings and groves for the production of copra. There were no other white men on the island.

COLNEY noted as Rand drew closer to the house that he was dressed in a pair of pale blue dungaree trousers, and a trade shirt of faded gingham such as native labor boys bought at Strahan's trading station on Partoolen Island. The young man's feet were shod in brown cloth shoes, and his bare ankles showed under the rolled up dungarees. On his head was a white topped cap with a black vizor which was generally of glazed cardboard—more of Strahan's cheap trade goods.

"Well, Rand, where do you think you're goin'?" hailed Colney when the visitor was within a hundred yards. The planter's voice was not gruff, nor did it carry any welcoming tone.

Rand stopped. He pulled the vizor down over his eyes and looked across the white flecked sea toward Partoolen, scanning the water as if he expected to find on it a vessel of some sort crossing the thirty-mile strait between the two islands.

"I'm coming over to have a talk with you, Mr. Colney," he answered presently.

"I guess it won't take you long," said Colney sharply.

"Seen anything coming this way from Strahan's?" called Rand.

"Guess I seen enough comin' from Strahan's island for one mornin'," retorted Colney with cold sarcasm. "And if you think I didn't see your outrigger land in Sloop Cove around daylight, you got another guess comin'."

Rand advanced toward the bungalow.

"I could've landed before dark if I'd wanted to, Mr. Colney."

"It wouldn't ha' been healthy."

"I'm aware of that."

"Why'd y' land?"

Rand took several more steps before he answered.

"Because the natives in the outrigger were on their way to the reefs of Kitchin Island to fish for sea slugs, and it was quicker and handier for 'em to pass here in the dark than to try and come through the reef breaks and go out again."

"Sounds good, now that you know we spotted you," was Colney's tart reply.

"If I'd landed out in front here before daylight I might've been seen by anybody Strahan sent after me," said Rand.

Now he was at the foot of the bamboo steps leading up to the veranda. He stopped, and his thin, sunburned face, upturned to the planter, revealed a peculiar grin, as if he enjoyed the mystification of Colney. Rand was not more than twenty-five, but his skin was deeply tanned from several years in the islands.

"Hey!" exclaimed the planter. "What'n hell'd anybody be chasin' you from Strahan's place for? You're workin' for him."

Rand shook his head.

"I'm done at Strahan's—and I've got a belly full, I can tell you that."

"You go and tell that to somebody else," rasped Colney. "I ain't sucker enough to fall for none of your games here—nor for Strahan's slick stuff." Still, it was plain that he was impressed.

"I tell you I'm off Cap'n Strahan. You don't have to believe it if you don't want to."

"You've come to a bad place if you've quit him, and you ought to know as much. Nobody has to tell you there's bad blood between us."

"I knew that when I started. But not only have I quit him, but I'm on the run from him."

The explanation was in a quiet tone, but with a hardening of the mouth as the words were spoken.

Colney stared down for a minute, doubtful, and frankly suspicious of the young man.

"How could you be on the run from Strahan? That was one of his outriggers—and his own natives."

"They're not Strahan's natives, I tell you," retorted Rand. "They didn't know I'd had trouble with the Cap. All they have to do with Strahan is to sell him their *trepang;* and when I told 'em last night that I wanted to come along and be landed here, they didn't know any different. He'd have stopped me if he'd known, of course."

"What'd he be stoppin' you for—if you've quit your job?"

"One of his natives stole four cases of his gin. Strahan swears I stole it and sold it to the *Belleflower* before the skipper pulled out. As trader at Partoolen, you know that what Strahan says goes—and I don't intend to be slammed into jail for a couple of years on his say-so."

"I ain't been havin' a row with Strahan for a couple of years 'thout knowin' he's got a ring in the nose of the gover'ment men," said Colney. "But I can't see why you head for my place and try to hang your grief on me."

"I didn't have any time to pick and choose. You can see that I got away in my working clothes. Only place I could go in that outrigger was towards Kitchin—and there's nobody or nothing on that island."

"Might as well ha' gone to Kitchin, or stayed on Partoolen, come to that. Strahan's got police power that includes this island as well as his own, and he can come here in the *Kepala* and search my jungles for you, and I ain't got no way to stop him."

RAND turned away, worried. He thought a minute, then looked up again at Colney.

"I could have hid in the hills here and got my grub nights by raiding your cook shack, but I decided to come straight to you and see if you'd help me a few days until some boat comes along that I could get away in."

"And all it would cost me, when Strahan found it out, would be to lose my plantation concession for hidin' a man on the run."

"Strahan'd have to prove first that I stole that gin and sold it—and as soon as I can catch the skipper of the *Belleflower* I can prove I'm innocent."

"Don't be too sure you can," advised Colney. "Strahan's most likely framed things with the skipper. He's done plenty of that with skippers; look at my godowns full of copra that I can't sell until some tradin' skipper comes along who ain't one of Strahan's yes-men."

"I might tell you a few things about Strahan myself," said Rand.

He craned his neck a little to look past a bamboo stanchion for a glimpse of Kenlin partly concealed behind the open door, listening.

"You better come up and have a cup of coffee," suggested Colney with sudden affability. "Puts me in the position of harborin' a man on the run from Strahan's brand of law, but if you go into the jungle he'll say I was hidin' you, anyhow, so it's all the same thing. Kenlin's here, and he can witness that I'm only lettin' you tell your story."

"Thanks," said Rand.

He mounted the steps. Kenlin came

into the open, wiping his face with a towel. He nodded to Rand.

"You're sure in a jam, Rand, with Strahan lookin' to put you in jail," said the foreman.

Rand paused as he glanced at the rifle lying across the table.

"That was intended for talking to me with while I was down in the palm grove, eh?" he remarked with a grin.

"We keep that for Strahan—and his spies," replied Colney curtly.

He turned to scan the sea again in the direction of Partoolen, then gestured Rand to a chair by the table. Kenlin stepped forward and lifted the rifle, to set it back against the wall of the bungalow—well out of reach of the table.

"I'd be a damned fool to come here spying for Strahan," said Rand. "Especially, as he intends to kill me when he gets me in range."

"Shucks!" exclaimed Kenlin. "You don't mean to say he'll kill you over four cases of trade gin!"

"The gin's only a trumped up excuse for filling me with a magazine of automatic bullets."

"Excuse for what?" demanded Colney.

"He wants me out of the way; but I'll give him a run for his money."

"But you ain't got a gun," objected Colney. "He can't shoot down an unarmed man."

"He'd see that I was armed—after I was dead. That's one of Strahan's little tricks, ain't it?" He took the coffee pot from Colney and poured a cupful.

"You know," said the planter, "that Strahan's done his best to run me bankrupt because I won't sell my copra to him at his own cutthroat price. I'll see him in hell with the hatches down first."

Rand looked into Colney's angry eyes with a steady gaze.

"He's making plans to have you kicked off this island, legally. He could use your plantation, Mr. Colney."

"What's his plans?"

"I don't know the details. But Deputy Commissioner Corcoran arrived a week ago, and they're cooking something up against you."

Colney slammed a fist down on the table.

"I guessed it! So Corcoran's come along ahead of time, hey?"

"Why didn't you go to Corcoran and tell him Strahan wanted to kill you?" asked Kenlin.

"Because Corcoran's afraid—just as Strahan is—that I know too much. I don't know anything definite, but they think I do. So all Strahan had to do was to plug me, show my body to Corcoran with a revolver in my hand that'd been fired. That's why I hid in that outrigger and got away."

"You ain't goin' to be much of a help to me in my row with Strahan," said the planter in disgust.

"No, I'm not," agreed Rand, "except that I know the line of guff he's been handing out to the commissioner against you for the last couple of years. Says you send natives from here to make trouble with his workers, to poison his wells and so on."

Colney frowned.

"He can't prove them things. The gover'ment can't use the testimony of natives against me, because they'll swear to anything for a few sticks of tobacco."

Colney chewed at a cigar, but did not strike a match. His shrewd eyes studied Rand.

"No, he can't prove 'em," assented the young man. "But with Corcoran behind him, Strahan can get you legal enough."

"How do I know," demanded Colney, "that this ain't the frameup—that I harbor a man on the run from Strahan, and lose my concession rights from it?"

Rand grinned.

"You can prove it by letting Strahan come over here and kill me." He put down his cup, and his demeanor changed with sudden panic. "I tell you he ain't going to kill me—I'll get into the hills!" He jumped out of his chair and started for the steps on the run.

Colney grabbed at the fleeing man, but missed him. Kenlin blocked the way.

"No you don't!" said the foreman, as

he thrust Rand back. "We'll decide when you go!"

Colney put a hand on Rand's shoulder.

"I don't aim to give you up to Strahan —nor to Corcoran neither. But you got to work with me so I'll keep in the clear of the law on this."

"Hide me, Mr. Colney! Hide me! You know Strahan'll kill—"

"Now you keep your shirt tucked in," soothed Colney. "I ain't goin' to walk into no trap by hidin' you; no. But you've got to git out of here before my natives know too much. You got to take to the hills and hide in the caves at the pass at the Jug and Pitcher, so—"

"But what'll I live on?" asked Rand. "I'll be in a trap myself, just waiting for Strahan to corner me, and—"

"I'll send a native I can trust with grub tonight," said Colney. "When Strahan comes, I'll tell him you got over to the other side of the island, and he'll look himself cockeyed on the west shore in the jungles. By that time I'll have you hid in one of my sheds—but I'll let him search the sheds first. I ain't goin' to let Strahan kill you, Rand."

"What proof have I got that you'll play square with me?" demanded Rand. "For all I know, you'll turn me over to Strahan or Commissioner Corcoran, to make yourself strong with the government, and then—"

"I'll prove it to you," said Colney. He reached round and took the rifle from against the wall. "Here! This has sixteen shots in it—and I wouldn't be handin' it to you if I intended to play double. Think I'd be damned fool enough to arm a man if I thought he was one of Strahan's spies, like I did when I saw you landin' here this mornin'?"

RAND took the weapon. Doubtfully, as if still unconvinced that Colney really meant what he said, the young man emptied the magazine and examined the cartridges. Satisfied, he loaded it again. He turned to Colney, with lips twitching with emotion as he spoke to the planter.

"You're saving my life. Before Strahan can kill me, he'll find he's got a shooting job on his hands that he ain't looking for."

"A man's got a right to defend himself from a snake like Strahan," said Colney with righteous indignation. "But you won't have to kill him, because he won't go up to the pass if I can help it."

"If he does, and he pulls a gun on me, he'll never get back here alive!" vowed Rand.

"You do like I say and nobody'll git hurt," soothed Colney. "But you got to back me up in one thing. If anything goes wrong, and you're caught, you got to swear you stole that rifle out of my house here, on your way to the hills. Kenlin's a witness to it, anyhow. You got to protect me, like I'm protectin' you."

"I'll play the game just as square with you as you play it with me," promised Rand.

Colney wrapped a loaf of bread in a newspaper, tore half the tablecloth off, and put a filled *olla* of water into the bundle.

"This'll hold you till night. Now, you come round to this side of the house, where you can't be seen from the copra sheds, and git into the jungle. Bear off to the right until you hit the bare spot, and go up the gorge. Keep under cover as much as you can on the way up. Hide in the second cave on the right hand side of the pass; from there you can see anybody comin' up. But don't plug my native when he shows up after dark with the grub."

Rand moved over the matting, rifle in one hand and bundle in the other.

"I'll do just what you say," he said chokingly.

He slipped over the veranda rail and, with a wave of his bundle, hastily crossed the ten yards of the clearing about the bungalow and disappeared into the jungle.

Kenlin grinned at Colney.

"So Corcoran has got to Partoolen, has he? Well, he's sure bought chips in a poker game, and lacks aces, when he's dealin' with you, boss."

"I ain't so damned sure where the

aces are in this game—yet," said Colney.

He sat down and lighted the ragged cigar he had been chewing.

Kenlin began to laugh.

"I suppose you knew all the time, when you handed that rifle over, that it's the one we filed the firin' pin off, so if a native swiped it he'd be a little handicapped tryin' to kill anybody with it?"

"Hell, no!" exclaimed Colney. He went inside to the rifle rack just inside the door and brought out a rifle. "This is the one with the firin' pin off."

He handed it to Kenlin, who examined the mechanism.

"You're right," he agreed. "I thought your game was to let Strahan kill him—and then we'd testify to what Rand told us. That might put Strahan out of our way, if we could hang a murder like that on him."

"No, I don't aim to let Strahan kill him," said Colney. "Rand knows more than he admitted this mornin', and he'll loosen up a little later."

Colney blew his cigar smoke toward Partoolen Island, his brows wrinkled in thought.

"There ought to be somethin' in this for us, one way or another," said Kenlin.

"That's what I was thinkin' myself," said Colney. "And I guess we'll have time to study it out before we see the *Kepala* headin' over this way."

Kenlin laughed again in his quiet way.

"I guess you know what's goin' to happen right now," said the foreman. "You ain't the kind to hand a rifle over to one of Strahan's men, 'thout havin' some idea on how the cards'll fall."

"I ain't so cockeyed sure, at that," replied the planter.

II

COLNEY laid down the binoculars.

"She ain't headin' for the reef break at all," he remarked. "On that course, she'll pass here."

Kenlin picked up the glasses and studied the *Kepala*. Strahan's schooner had the wind on her starboard quarter, and as Colney said, it appeared that she intended to give Valean Island a wide berth.

"Two men in white on her quarter-deck," said the foreman. "That means Corcoran's with Strahan."

They were in the wheel house of the *Semut*, Colney's gasoline tugboat, used for towing rafts of coconuts or lumber, therefore named the "ant" in Malay. The tug was lying in her berth between two copra sheds built out over the water, under a *nipa* palm shelter suspended between the two roofs.

"They know that outrigger left for Kitchin, but they don't suspect Rand landed here," said Colney.

"They'd be comin' in if they knew the truth," said Kenlin.

"She ain't goin' to luff," said Colney, watching the schooner. "Start her up—we got to run out and head her off."

"Where she is now, she'd have to bring the wind abeam for the best channel to the anchorage behind the reef," agreed Kenlin.

He went below, and with the engine running to his satisfaction, came on deck to cast off the light lines. Colney headed the *Semut* seaward.

It was nearly noon. The *Kepala* by this time was abreast of Colney's house, a couple of miles off the land. Colney swung to starboard when clear of the sheds, making for a small reef break to the northward, where the light draft of the tugboat could run the shallow channel.

"I could signal her to come in," said the planter as they began to lift to the gentle swells, "but I ain't goin' to tell Strahan what to do, and have him tell me to go to hell in front of Commissioner Corcoran."

"You're dead right," agreed Kenlin. "If Strahan knowed where Rand is, he'd jump at the chance to come in and give you a bawlin' out in front of Corcoran."

Colney nodded assent.

"Sure he would! But this is the time Strahan's goin' to git bawled out himself. I'll learn him a few things he didn't look

to find out when he started this way from Partoolen."

"He needs to learn a-plenty," growled Kenlin. He went below to pet his engine a little.

Colney, with the wheel spokes jammed between his knees, held his glasses on the *Kepala*. He could see men moving about in an excited way on the quarterdeck. The departure of the tugboat from her berth had attracted attention, and probably surprise.

When Kenlin returned to the wheelhouse, Colney turned to him.

"If Corcoran's out after Rand with Strahan, why didn't the commissioner use his own cutter? What'd he come in Strahan's schooner for?"

"Because he wants to hang any dirty work on Strahan, and by usin' the *Kepala* instead of the cutter, Corcoran washes the hands of the government if things go wrong."

"You've about hit it," said Colney. "Well, I'm glad that they've come in the *Kepala*, because with Strahan on his own deck, I can tell him anything I want. If he was in the gover'ment boat with Corcoran, I'd be sassin' the gover'ment."

"You got reason enough, boss, to be sore."

"Strahan can't put nothin' over on me just because he's got Corcoran along," declared Colney. "They ain't goin' to come on my island and kill nobody on a frame-up, I can tell you that, Ed."

They made the cut through the reef, with breakers close aboard on both sides, and the tugboat lurched into the heavier swells outside. So far, Colney had been running on a course almost parallel with the schooner's, but now he put his wheel over and ran to pass ahead of Strahan's bows by the time the *Kepala* had gained the proper distance.

Convinced now that the tugboat wanted to intercept her, the schooner promptly luffed and swung head to the wind with shivering headsails. Colney again altered his course and headed straight for her.

A few minutes later, rolling heavily as she brought the swells abeam, the *Semut* rounded the schooner's stern and shut off power in the lee of the bigger vessel.

"Did you come out to see me, Mr. Colney?" hailed Corcoran.

His white jacket fluttered in the wind, and he clung to his big sun helmet.

"I got a few words I want to say, yes, sir," answered the planter, his elbows on the sill of the open wheel house window. "But I didn't come out to see you special, Mr. Commissioner."

Corcoran, a spare, bespectacled man with gray hair, turned to Strahan, who stood nearby, holding himself against the motion of the schooner with a hand to the after mizzen shroud. The trader was a big man, clad in baggy white trousers and a blue shirt open at the neck. He was smoking a pipe, and as he grinned at Corcoran, he said something to the government man which Colney did not catch. Then Strahan laughed harshly, and twisted his white topped cap to what was intended as an insolent angle on his head.

THE TRADER took his pipe from his mouth, stroked his black mustache with the back of a hand and leaned over the rail.

"If you don't want to see Commissioner Corcoran, then why 'n hell're you headin' to cut my course, and bobbin' around here in that teapot?"

"You didn't have to stop because I'm on the ocean, Strahan," retorted Colney. "You ain't bossin' the water around my island."

"What do you want?" bawled the trader.

"Not much from you, Strahan," came the retort from the wheelhouse window. "But I'd say offhand that it's more'n you're lookin' for today. Only reason I'm talkin' now is that I want the commissioner to hear my remarks."

"Then shoot the works and be quick about it!" challenged Strahan. "Anything you've got to say, I'd want Commissioner Corcoran to hear, anyhow, so don't keep anything back because you look to hurt my feelings."

"Do you want to come aboard?" asked Corcoran.

Colney shook his head.

"What I got to say I can say from here, and I'm meanin' all of it, Commissioner. If Strahan don't stop interferin' with my plantation, and my business, I'm goin' to make somebody jump for it, in or out of the gover'ment. I got a right to some protection. My godowns are full of copra, and Strahan's fillin' schooner skippers with a lot of lies ag'in me, so they don't come over here to buy —and that's because Strahan wants me to be forced to sell to him at cutthroat prices."

"That's a damned lie!" called Strahan. "I only offered to buy from you once, when you made a beller about needin' cash, and I offered you the same price I was getting for my own copra, without a cent out for commission. The reason skippers don't come over to buy from you on their own account, is they ain't got any use for you—and you're trying to blame me for that."

"I can't listen to complaints in this fashion, Mr. Colney," objected Corcoran.

"I'm payin' lease money, and you got to listen," was Colney's retort. "You keep away from my place, except when you want taxes and such, and I got to catch you when I can, even if you are chummin' around with Strahan on his schooner."

"You'll either have to come aboard and make a formal complaint, or wait until I get over to your place in my cutter. I'm making my regular rounds."

"I can't wait until you come back, but I'd like to say somethin' more, even if Strahan is listenin' around."

"Now, look here," objected Corcoran, "you come out here and Strahan heaves to so you can have your say, and then you find fault because he's here. I've heard all that from you before, anyhow, and you've no proof to offer that can be used legally against Captain Strahan."

"You come ashore with me, and I'll show you some proof this time," said Colney.

Corcoran and Strahan discussed something in low tones which the planter could not hear.

"I'll go ashore if you like," called the commissioner, "but it's got to be something definite. If you want to give me some idea of what your new information is, Captain Strahan will have the right to go ashore with me and hear your charges."

"That's O.K. with me!" declared Colney with sudden enthusiasm. "I want Strahan to have all the chance in the world to explain why one of his outriggers sneaked one of his men ashore on Valean this mornin'—and why in hell he thinks he can pull that kind of stuff and git away with it."

"Hey, what's that you're talkin' about?" yelled Strahan quickly, leaning over the rail.

Then he turned and spoke to Corcoran in a gruff undertone and, without waiting for an answer from Colney, hurried down the companionway.

"I guess that give him plenty of an earful!" Colney laughed. Kenlin broke into a loud guffaw.

"What's that about somebody landing?" demanded Corcoran.

"You heard what I said," replied Colney. "Just as good as Strahan did—and I guess he found some business below more important than listenin' at me."

"I can tell you now that Captain Strahan had nothing to do with a man landing on your island," said Corcoran. "As a matter of fact, we're hunting the man you saw, but we had no idea he'd go anywhere near you. Besides, that's not Strahan's outrigger we're after, but belongs to native *bêche-de-mer* fishers that Rand escaped with last night from Partoolen when he found that he was going to be arrested for theft from Strahan's store."

"I knew he'd have some cock-and-bull story to tell you," scoffed Colney. "That'll do as good as any other yarn. But if you'll come ashore and catch this Rand up, I'll bet you a hat full of eggs

that when the showdown comes Rand'll admit Strahan sent him to make trouble with my natives—or burn me out."

"Nonsense!" said Corcoran. "I'll certainly go ashore, but I doubt that Strahan'll want to travel in your tugboat, under the cir—" He turned as the trader appeared on deck again. Strahan was wearing a pair of heavy automatic pistols in holsters hanging from a magazine belt.

"*Serang*, lower away a boat!" called the master of the *Kepala*.

"Commissioner, you can come along with me," shouted Colney. "And Strahan can come, too. All I want is to clear this business up, right and proper. If he ain't in the wrong, I'll apologize, and as this is gover'ment business, there ain't no need of either of you sloshing around out here in a boat when I can put you ashore in twenty minutes."

"All right, that's decent of you," replied Strahan. "Come alongside the lee to a ladder. Never mind the boat, *serang*—and bear away a little to make a lee for the tug."

"Have you any idea where Rand is hiding?" asked Corcoran, as the tug nosed up alongside the schooner's ladder.

"Why, yes," said Colney. "One of my natives happened to be down near Sloop Point about daylight and trailed him up to the pass."

Captain Strahan paused.

"Then if he got round to the west shore I might as well take the *Kepala* over that side to hunt for him."

"He ain't over on the west shore at all," said Colney. "He's hidin' in one of the caves—the second one to the right."

"Did your native notice if Rand had any guns on him?" asked Corcoran.

"He ain't armed that I know of," said Colney. "If he had a gun, my boy'd mention it, because I was aimin' to go up myself and bring Rand in when I noticed the schooner headin' over this way."

"I'll bring him in, don't you worry," said Strahan.

Colney headed the tugboat for the nearest reef break and gave the engine all the throttle there was.

III

CAPTAIN STRAHAN had little to say aboard the tugboat. He kept to himself on the after deck and smoked his pipe with a mechanical puffing. His heavy, unshaven jaws showed that his teeth were gripped on the pipe stem, and his black eyes revealed his smoldering anger as he scanned the high peaks of the barrier hills which formed the backbone of Valean Island.

The great fissure of rock, which was the pass, was visible as a blue gash where the blueness of the sky met the green of the jungles. The pass was between two peaks, which, by their contours as seen from seaward, were known as the Jug and Pitcher. A gorge leading up into the hills formed a natural road, steep and mostly covered with ashes, loose lava and a heavy coating of pumice dust discharged from an old volcanic crater. There were green spots visible where the great creeping vines ran out from the jungles on both sides and carpeted the rocks and loose débris.

Strahan knew that the ascent to the pass was not difficult. In one of those caves, by Coloney's account, Rand was hiding, unless the man had decided to push on the the western beach. But on that shore of the island there was only a jungled wilderness, and groves of wild cocoanut groves along the sandy shores. No ships stopped on that side, and only Colney and his natives visited it to gather the cocoanuts and raft them home with the *Semut*.

Commissioner Corcoran stood by Colney while the latter steered. They spoke of casual things. Colney had turned agreeable, as if having wrongfully accused Strahan of sending a man secretly to the island, he was open to being convinced of his error.

Captain Strahan was the first to jump ashore as the tug ran under the shelter between the copra sheds. He waited for Corcoran to land.

Colney spoke impersonally as he helped Corcoran ashore.

"If Cap'n Strahan wants, I'll send some of my boys up to the pass with him to bear a hand if—"

"I'll go get him alone," said Strahan gruffly. "As I didn't bring any of my men from the schooner, I don't need any witnesses along who're your—" He stopped abruptly and started toward the palm grove.

Colney winked furtively at Kenlin, who was securing the mooring lines. And then, at the receding back of the trader, Colney called sharply:

"I guess I know what you mean, Strahan. You figure my natives might tell lies agin you to Corcoran—if anything goes wrong up in the pass."

Strahan swung and looked back.

"What could go wrong?" he demanded, quick belligerence in his tone.

Corcoran turned to stare at Colney, curious to see what the planter's answer would be. But Colney did not answer at once. He blinked his eyes and spat over into the water, waiting until he could restrain his language and put the greatest possible reasonableness in what he was about to say.

"It's like this, Commissioner," the planter began slowly. "I've mebbe made a mistake about this whole business—I mean goin' out to head you off like I did, and bein' so rough with Strahan in front of you. It was kind of mean, but what else could I think about Rand, comin' the way he did? I shouldn't want anybody to git hurt from my raisin' hell."

He lifted his hat with his left hand, held it an inch or so above his head, and scratched his scalp with the fingers of the hand holding the hat. He seemed puzzled and unable to express himself completely.

"Do you mean," questioned Corcoran, "that you're apologizing for having accused Captain Strahan of sending Rand here to make trouble for you?"

"I'm meanin' as much as that, yes," admitted Colney reluctantly. "And I've made the Cap pretty mad, I can see—and I don't want him to take his mad out on Rand."

"If Rand resists arrest, that's his mistake," said Corcoran. "Captain Strahan has police powers and he has a right to shoot—"

"That's it!" broke in Colney. "But I don't want to be reponsible for anything that happens. My natives steal a revolver now and then, and anything like that, they generally hide in them caves at the pass. Strahan might git plugged."

"I can look after myself with Rand," said Strahan, as he slapped a holster. "You know, Commissioner, it's up to me to bring Rand in, after Colney's complaint to you that I had a hand in one of my employees coming here. And I'm going to bring Rand in while you're on the ground here, Mr. Corcoran."

"You don't need to risk your life on my account," said Colney.

"I'll do the worrying about that," was Strahan's retort. "If Rand happens to have a gun, and he fires on me, I've a right to protect my life. I'll kill him if I have to."

He turned abruptly and headed for the palm grove again, heading in a direction that would take him to the mouth of the gorge.

Colney waved his hands in a gesture of helplessness.

"If you can't stop him, Commissioner, I can't. He don't need to go alone."

"You started this thing, and it comes with bad grace from you to find fault with Strahan's handling of it. You know the law—if Strahan sent a man here to injure you or your business, his concessions as trader and planter on Partoolen would have to be cancelled by me on proof of conspiracy against you."

"I don't care a damn, Commissioner, what Strahan does. I've warned him, and you. All I talked for was to show you and Strahan that I don't want to be blamed if somebody gits hurt. He can git that man off this island any old way, dead or alive, for all of me."

Already Strahan was almost at the jungle's edge. And presently he swung past the yards where Colney's natives were stripping and splitting cocoanuts for

the drying racks, to disappear into the narrow lip of the gorge.

Colney and Corcoran walked toward the bungalow, leaving Kenlin busy in the engine room of the tug. And by the time the two had reached the veranda the noon bell was clanging from the main godown.

Corcoran paused a minute before going up the steps, to take off his helmet and wipe his forehead. He turned to watch the native workmen moving to their huts in the jungle shades on the side of the steep hill.

Far outside the fringing reef, the *Kepala* was standing off and on. With a sigh, the deputy commissioner climbed the steps wearily and dropped into a hammock. Colney went back to the cook shack to order a No. 1 tiffin for the government official.

KENLIN did not appear for the meal. Instead, he ate on the rear veranda and turned in for his noon hour nap on a canvas cot.

The commissioner and the planter dallied at their meal, and talked of everything but Strahan's trip into the hills. And Corcoran had been smoking for nearly half an hour, lolling in the hammock, when he lifted himself suddenly and swung his feet to the matting.

The sharp report of a firearm came booming down from the hills.

"They're at it!" exclaimed Colney, rising from his canvas reclining chair.

The birds in the cocoanut grove rose swiftly from the ground and whirled in panic flight to the mop heads of the lofty trees.

"That was one of Strahan's automatics!" asserted Corcoran.

Kenlin, waked by the report, came round to the front veranda.

"That sounded too sharp for an automatic," he said. "More like a rifle, I'd say."

"That's what I'd say, too," said Colney. "Strahan's got heavy caliber guns, and they don't—"

The low, dull roar of another shot came to the ears of the three listening men.

"Now, *that's* a pistol," said Colney in a low tone. "You was right, Ed—that first one was a rifle, but just now it was Strahan firin'. Looks to me as if Rand had a gun, somehow—"

Two more shots, in rapid succession, and both from the same weapon, broke in on Colney. They knew now that the first, and the last two shots, were from a rifle. They were all silent for a few minutes, waiting for the heavier reports from Strahan's guns, which would tell that he was returning the fire.

But the minutes passed and there were no more shots.

Corcoran ran down the steps, and a little to the left of the house, shading his eyes and vainly studying the pass.

"You can't see anything from the flats here," called Colney. "And I'd say Strahan's been hit, and hit bad, if he don't shoot back. Them last two shots, they come from a repeatin' rifle, I'd bet a hat full of eggs!"

There was much shouting among the natives far down in their village, for the sound of firing had startled them. But seeing that those at the house had also heard the reports, none of them started for the bungalow.

Corcoran returned to the veranda. He appeared aghast at the possibility that Strahan had been killed. and paced the matting like a man in a daze.

"I told him not to go up there alone," declared Colney. "But he wouldn't listen at me."

"But Strahan is a crack shot," said Corcoran. "And there wasn't a chance in a thousand that Rand had a rifle!"

"Ed," said Colney, as if he had just thought of something for the first time, "look the gun rack over and see if there's a rifle missing."

He winked and shook his head in a negative when Corcoran was not looking.

Kenlin went inside the door and rattled the weapons in the rack against the wall.

"Ain't any missin' from the house," he said as he returned to the veranda. "But

that one I fixed was down in the shop last night—and mebbe it's been lifted durin' the night."

"That's so," said Colney. "Better pole down to the beach and see what you can find in the machine shop." He winked again, this time with a nod of assent.

In a few minutes Kenlin came running back from his visit to the shop.

"It's gone!" he called. "And the lock busted on the door." He came panting up the steps.

"Well, now, that looks bad," said Colney. "Rand mebbe was ashore here before dark, swiped that rifle, got scared into his outrigger again, and then landed again at Sloop Point."

"But you said your native didn't mention the fact that Rand was armed; and certainly a native would know that the man had a rifle, if he was trailed to the pass."

"It's beyond me," declared Colney, looking mystified. "All we know now is that a rifle's missin'—and them was rifle shots we heard."

"Poor Strahan!" said Corcoran. "He walked straight into an ambush! And with only pistols against a man with a long range rifle."

"Guess we better be headin' up the gorge and see what's happened,' said Colney, reaching for his hat.

"No!" insisted Corcoran. "I'm reluctant to have anybody else risk their lives until we know more. If Strahan's been killed, and Rand's got a repeating rifle, he'll be a desperate man to cope with. We'd have to kill him—and he might kill some of us. He'll most likely go over to the western shore now, anyhow. If you'll run up the call flag we'll bring the *Kepala* in, and wait an hour or so. If Strahan doesn't show up this afternoon, I'll have to bring an armed party here in the morning from my cutter, and go after Rand with a proper force."

"If Strahan's alive, we'll hear him talk again with his automatics, you can bet on that," said Colney. "But it's my bet that's he's finished off."

"I'm afraid so," said Corcoran.

"We's better run that call flag up, Ed," said Colney. "And I want to take another look in the machine shop, so I'll go along with you . . . Better have a shot of that brandy, Commissioner—it's in on the table in the big room."

He followed Kenlin into the palm grove.

"I GUESS that settled Strahan's hash," said the planter, when they had proceeded far enough to be out of earshot of Corcoran.

"He had it comin' to him," said Kenlin. "And a fat chance you'd have with Corcoran, if Strahan was caught tryin' to run you off this island legal."

"How do you mean, legal?" asked Colney.

"Well, what's in my mind, is that Corcoran'd make it his business to back Strahan up in anything agin you. Strahan couldn't be in wrong with the government. They want some of their own gang in place of you here."

"Sure!" agreed Colney. "Corcoran's gittin' a damned sight more pay from Strahan than from the gover'ment. I been on that game for a year or more. But with Strahan out of the way, we can sit tight. I'm goin' to take you into partnership, Ed—and when things quiet down about Strahan gittin' killed, we'll have this place, and the tradin' and plantin' rights on Partoolen."

"Now you're talkin'!" said Kenlin. "Boss, you can count on me to back you to the hilt on what's just happened. And you, as well as me, I guess, know that Corcoran don't want to go up now and catch Rand."

"Corcoran's tender of gittin' a ball through his gover'ment hide, that's why."

"You've guessed wrong. Corcoran don't want us around when Rand's caught; and he don't want Rand took alive, because Rand'll most likely spill a few beans on him to save his own neck. Corcoran's too thick with Strahan—agin us."

Colney stopped in his tracks.

"I'm damned if you ain't right!" he declared.

He turned and looked back at the veranda where the commissioner was seated at the table.

Kenlin moved on toward the signal mast, and Colney followed.

"It's just like Rand told us. Both of 'em want to kill him, and Corcoran knows he's got to make sure of it."

"Yes, and when Rand's dead, that's when I'll tell Corcoran that I'm to have Strahan's concessions at Partoolen. I may not know much, but Corcoran'll think I know more'n's healthy for him."

"We got him now where we want him," said Kenlin.

Colney entered the machine shop, and by the time he came out, Kenlin had the red and blue pennant at the masthead. The *Kepala* responded at once to the signal, and headed for the main channel through the widest reef break.

They found Corcoran nervously pacing the veranda. He was reluctant to talk. He simply wandered around, shaking his head despondently. Presently he went out and walked in the palm grove, smoking cigarets, and throwing them away before they were finished.

Colney and Kenlin sat and whispered, watching the *Kepala* forereaching for the channel. Colney rose from his chair to fetch a fresh can of tobacco—and froze midway to the door. He saw Corcoran running for the house.

"What's up, boss?" asked Kenlin, noticing Colney's stiff posture, and the look of surprise on his face.

"He's seen something!" said Colney, pointing at the commissioner.

By the time Corcoran had reached the corner of the house—he was not headed for the steps—the men on the veranda could hear the heavy trudge of shod feet pounding over the coral and gravel at the side of the house. They turned to look—and cried out in amazement.

Rand walked into sight around the corner of the veranda railing. Nickel handcuffs on his wrists glinted in the sunlight. Following, appeared Captain Strahan, holding at the ready the rifle which had been given to Rand by Colney.

"Well, damn my picture!" yelled Colney. "We all thought you was dead, Strahan!"

"I reckon you did," said Strahan. "It ain't Rand's fault that I ain't—but I got him."

"I'm mightily relieved to see you, Captain!" declared Corcoran.

Both men were covered with the light volcanic dust of the gorge, which stuck to their sweaty faces, lined with streaks of perspiration. They paused before the steps, then with a gesture, Strahan ordered Rand to go up to the veranda. He obeyed sullenly, the chain of the handcuffs clinking as he walked.

"We heard him fire at you," said Corcoran, "and your shot in reply."

Strahan nodded. He turned to his prisoner.

"Now, Rand, I want you to tell the commissioner where you got this rifle."

"Colney gave it to me this morning," said Rand.

The planter, with upraised fist, started toward the young man.

"That's a damned lie!" he screamed. "You stole it from the machine shop—or somebody stole it for you!"

"Just a minute!" said Corcoran, pushing Colney back.

"You can't pull this stuff on me, neither you nor Strahan!" raged Colney. "You can't use Strahan's men, like this one, to frame me. His evidence as such ain't no good! He's an arrested criminal, too, for stealin' from—"

"Mr. Colney," broke in Corcoran, "you're not aware of the facts. For a long time you've sent natives over to Strahan's to burn his buildings, to poison his wells, to foment outbreaks by his natives. We never could get proper evidence, because we can not use the confessions of natives legally. But we've got you this time."

"Got me how! With a lie by a man who's been hired by Strahan?"

"Rand left the employ of Strahan a week ago—to enter the government

service. He landed this morning on my orders, and you armed him, then sent Strahan into what appeared to be an ambush to kill him. That's conspiracy with a man you presumed to be a fugitive from justice. The shots we heard gave you great satisfaction because you thought Strahan was dead as a result of your plot.

"Colney, you and your hired man can gather your personal traps. The government will pay for the copra in your sheds at the going price—but your concession here is at an end. Neither of you will ever be granted any rights in these islands again. You'll go aboard the *Kepala*, and I'll take both of you to headquarters for trial."

KITE FISHING

By ARTHUR WOODWARD

TO THE MAJORITY of us who think of fishing as a more or less simple, lazy sort of occupation, which entails a lot of sitting and thinking, but mostly just sitting, the intrusion of primitive aviation as a means of assistance in luring the finny tribe from their native haunts may come as somewhat of a surprise.

Down in New Guinea, among the natives of Dobu, no fishing tackle of thirty years ago—and perhaps today, for all I know—was complete without the addition of a kite.

According to reliable authorities the kites were made of four leaves, one foot long and three or four inches wide. These flimsy air travelers had two strings, one about a quarter of a mile long, the other between three and nine hundred feet in length.

Sometimes the kites were flown from the beach, but the favorite method was to fly them from a canoe. The long string was held by the fisherman. To the shorter string, which was also attached to the kite, was fastened the lure for the fish.

This bait was not hung on any hook. In fact no hook was used. In place of a hook the canny native used a small skein of spider web.

This tassel of spider web was about half an inch thick and three or four inches long. When the canoe was in motion and the kite was in the air, the spider web bait skimmed the surface of the water and the fish lunging at the trailing gossamer got its teeth entangled in the webby maze. Then the fish was landed in a small triangular net.

The spiders from which the entangling webs were obtained are peculiar to Dobu. The insects were held in the ends of cleft sticks and tossed about until a close, double tissue of web between three and four inches wide and four to six feet long was procured.

In the Solomon Islands years ago, before civilization settled its blight upon the waters and islands of the South Seas, a similar tissue of web was used for strangling widows.

The forlorn beaches of the Slave Coast—what could they offer this white man beyond fever and liquor, fighting and the sun . . ?

NORLAND'S GRUDGE

By ROBERT SIMPSON

THE NORLAND beach gig boat sidled alongside the gig wharf of the government beach on Nana's Creek as if it were apologizing for its presumption.

Not that Hallam, who, with his Kroo boy crew, occupied the gig, felt in the least apologetic. On the contrary, for reasons that, to Hallam, were decidedly real and personal, Hallam had a chip on his shoulder, and he was prepared and rather anxious to have it knocked off at any moment. He did not particularly care who knocked it off, but he hoped it might be Galloway.

Galloway was no less a personage than the district commissioner, but this meant nothing to Hallam who was comparatively new, young and too full of quinine and loneliness and lacerated pride to care if Galloway had been the governor of the lousy country. The lousy country referred to was officially mapped as Southern Nigeria, and its front doorstep was the Slave Coast on the Bight of Benin; and Hallam did not like it. He did not like Galloway either, or anybody on the right bank of Nana's Creek and, being only too well aware that the country and Galloway and the right bank of Nana's Creek scarcely knew he was on earth, his social and official insignificance had made his life on the left bank of Nana's Creek a galling, sweltering, fever-and-quinine ridden loneliness that only a Norland's Beach assistant could understand.

He had come down in the gig from the isolation of Norland's Beach—more familiarly known as Norland's Grudge—to pay some customs duties. This was his only contact with the right bank of Nana's Creek, and it happened about once a month—that is, unless Norland himself, or Brant, who was Norland's acting agent and partner, chose to pay the money in person.

All of the remainder of the time Hallam stayed on Norland's Grudge and looked across the creek and found new things to hate; laughter and twinkling lights, ancient history and the faces of men of his own color.

The laughter and the lights were all on the right bank of Nana's Creek. The ancient history was on the left bank, and Brant was responsible for that. When he talked to Hallam at all it was to discourse on forgotten, sand covered empires that were forgotten and sand covered because, according to Brant, they had bartered

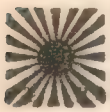
rugged simplicity for stultifying luxury which was always the dry rot of doom—whatever that meant.

Hallam did not care what it meant. Neither did he see any connection, as Brant seemed to do, between Norland's losing fight with the right bank of Nana's Creek and the ancient glories of Asshurbanipal and Sennacherib.

Norland was a wasp; slim, trim, vitriolic and dynamic, and lately he had added a mahogany concession or two to his trading activities just to annoy the right bank of Nana's Creek in one more direction. It pleased him to think that his single handed fight against the so-called trade combine on Nana's Creek was a stimulant to him—like a glass of fine wine in the morning chill of a Harmattan mist. He said he thrived on it.

Brant thought otherwise, and just before Norland had gone off on another of his rampaging tours of his concessions, Brant had warned him that if he didn't slow up he would go to pieces with unpleasant suddenness.

But nobody bothered to listen to Brant. Not even Hallam, who meant nothing at all to any one except to his own beach gang of Kroo boys, who wondered rather uneasily why a white man—particularly a so-so white man like Hallam—should beat a tom-tom every evening before he ordered bath water.



PRESENTLY Hallam ambled up the concrete strip from the gig wharf to the government treasury office carrying the sack of customs money, and carefully ignoring such white men as happened to be in evidence along the waterfront.

He did not know that his lips were drawn in a straight, colorless line, that his gray eyes were cold and hard or that his nervous system was strung as tightly as a bow string.

The last time he had paid customs duties to Galloway, the D.C. had had to count the money twice because he had made a mistake the first time. The afternoon had been truly West African—hot as a mustard plaster and muggy as a wet dish rag—and the treasury office being small, cramped and stuffy with tobacco smoke, the already surcharged atmosphere had become electrified with blasphemy, and Galloway had finally asked why in hell he, Hallam, hadn't brought larger and more easily counted money.

Hallam had not bothered to answer the question. And, of course, he had forgotten the incident. Completely. He had wiped the whole affair from the slate of his memory and nothing was further from his mind as he neared the treasury office door. Galloway was beneath his contempt. Just a ruddy government official with a lot of guns at his back, and he was just the kind of swine who needed those guns and took advantage of their existence.

"Damn his hide! Who does he think he is? What's he ever done to give him any license to yelp and cuss at *me!*"

There was no answer. The sphinx faced, khaki clad Yoruba orderly who heard him did not know what Hallam was talking about, and a moment later Hallam was standing in the treasury office doorway, looking at the solitary occupant of the place—a Sierra Leonese clerk who was resplendent in white flannels, a purple and rose-pink cricket belt, and a red and orange tie.

"What do you wish, if you please?" he asked, glancing at the sack of money the trading assistant carried. "If you have come to discharge an obligation to the customs department you will be required to wait. Mr. Galloway is alarmingly busy at the moment, as his new assistant has become malarial quite suddenly. You will be attended to in due course."

Hallam did not smile. There was nothing funny in anything—not after the months he had spent on the wrong side of Nana's Creek—and the smirkingly polite superiority in the shiny black face that looked down upon him from the elevation of a high stool rasped upon his tautened nerves with a suddenness that shook him from head to heel.

Mechanically, and principally to steady himself, he rested the sack of money on the small flat desk that was in line with the open treasury office door.

"Not on the desk, if you please," the clerk protested hurriedly. "I am instructed to place nothing of clutter upon that desk. The new assistant, who is malarial, is profusely particular—"

"Don't babble," Hallam said without any exclamation point, and left the bag of money on the desk. "Go and tell Galloway I want to pay him customs duties."

"Sir! Babble! Me! Are you aware—"

"Shut up!" Hallam moved a step nearer to the clerk. "And edge! Tell Galloway I'm waiting for him."

"Sir! Me! Babble! You—you have the presumption—"

"Damn you! Tell Galloway I'm waiting for him!"

"All right. What's it all about?"

Hallam spun sharply on his heel to face the man who had so suddenly intruded into the situation. And at once Hallam resented Galloway's habit of wearing thick rubber soled shoes—just as much as he resented Galloway's expression of complacent, self-satisfied inquiry.

"This clerk of yours—" he began and stopped, realizing that it should be beneath his dignity to make any kind of issue over an underling of the sort.

"Yes?" Galloway's long legs brought him almost to the middle of the floor at a stride. "What about him?"

"It isn't important."

"He has been insulting and profane to me! He has—"

"All right, Coffington. I'll hear your story later. Go up to the barracks and tell Captain Travers I'll be along in half an hour."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Coffington and his color scheme departed and Galloway, with just a casual glance into Hallam's cold gray eyes, sat down at the desk on which Hallam had placed the sack of silver. He drew the sack toward him.

"How much?" he asked briefly.

Hallam handed him the customs office bills covering the payment.

"Thanks." Galloway placed the bills on the desk and proceeded to open the money sack and disgorge its contents to suit his convenience. "How long have you been out here? Don't remember seeing you before."

Hallam winced and swallowed hard. His long, lean hands clenched at his sides as Galloway took a second cursory glance at the customs bills.

"Oh—" rather flatly. "You're from Norland's."

Hallam added nothing to the sum of Galloway's information, and Galloway said after awhile, "Rather lonely for you up there, isn't it?"

"I don't find it so."

"No?" Galloway did not even look up, but his short amused laugh was audible enough. "How long have you been with Norland?"

"Over six months."

"Six months!" Galloway stopped counting and looked up. "Ever been down here before?"

Hallam's mouth twisted curiously; a sudden, rather startling hint of unsuspected savagery that might have presaged almost anything.

"Hallam's the name," he said in a low hard voice.

"Hallam?" Galloway looked at him sharply. "Did you say Hallam?"

"That's my name."

"Hallam. Oh, yes. Yes. Hallam. I remember you now."

Obviously Galloway was lying. He did not remember Hallam, but the name seemed to have a quite familiar sound so far as he was concerned because his reaction to it was puzzlingly instantaneous.

"How is Brant?"

"He's all right—" shortly.

"That's fine." Galloway gave his attention rather hurriedly to the money again. "When do you expect Norland to get back?"

"Any time."

"Hunh. I suppose so." The district commissioner counted the money before him in silence for several minutes, then asked casually, "What sort of fellow is he to work for?"

"One of the best."

Galloway looked up quickly into Hallam's tense white face and he noted also that Hallam's hands were tightly clenched.

"One of the best, eh?" He paused significantly. "I'd never have suspected it."

"That is not important."

Galloway did not even blink.

"Perhaps it isn't. But you are the first assistant from Norland's beach I ever heard say a good word for him."

"That is not important either. Will you be good enough, Mr. Galloway, to check and accept that money and give me the customary receipt?"

"Surely."

ONCE more Galloway turned to the task in hand just as if Hallam's orders were the highest kind of law to him. And this time he completed the job, found the money correct and solemnly signed the proper document covering the transaction.

"Here you are," he said, and rose to hand the receipt and the empty sack to Hallam. "But what's all the rush? Why don't you stick around and have some small chop with Travers and me?"

Hallam looked as if Galloway had hit him.

"I—I am afraid you—"

"Ever been up to the barracks?" Galloway interrupted just as if he were in the habit of inviting trading beach assistants to hobnob with officialdom in its unofficial moments. "We have a real army up there and Travers is so damned proud of his new equipment he opens another bottle every time he has a chance to show it to anybody. Let's go up and josh him out of a couple of drinks. Just a minute till I put this wealth in the safe."

"I am afraid, Mr. Galloway—"

"Nothing of the sort—" turning the combination of the safe to open it. "I can recommend Travers' liquor, small chop and army, and if you have never met Travers' wife, you—"

"Thank you, Mr. Galloway. But I'm not yet reduced to the bread line. Good afternoon."

Hallam was only vaguely aware of a near collision with the indignant Mr. Coffington who chose to return to the treasury office at the moment Hallam so precipitately chose to leave it. He did not hear anything more Galloway might have said to him, but as he once more took his seat in the gig boat and snapped an order at his Kroo boys, he was of the opinion that he had put Galloway in his place rather neatly. He was more than halfway back to Norland's before he realized that he had been invited to have a drink, plus small chop, with Nana Creek's senior civil and military officers.

Of course, Galloway had only been josh-ing him. There had been a trick or a twist of sarcasm somewhere in the incredible incident. Norland beach assistants did not get invitations of the sort; not even from other trading beach assistants. That such an invitation should come from the district commissioner himself—well, the thing was just a joke, and a pretty cheap and nasty joke at that.

And in any event, Norland would not like it. Nobody would. Hallam knew how these things worked out, even when they were genuine. Even if Galloway had meant it; even if, after all these blistering, lonely months on Norland's Grudge, he, Hallam, had actually had a chance to talk to a white woman and watch her supervise the feeding of three or four hungry and thirsty men— But what was the use? It was too silly for words. A Norland beach assistant, if he mixed at all, mixed on sufferance. Social leftovers were the best he could expect.

Hallam's mouth twisted again in that same curiously savage fashion that Galloway had noted so carefully; yet the Kroo boys on Norland's beach listened in vain that evening for the sound of the small boy white man's customary beating of the tom-tom, and Hallam listened to Brant that night at dinner without hearing a word the man said.

Everything connected with that dinner—the food, the Kroo boy stewards, the intruding carpenter's beetle thumping its hard shell back against the walls in a blind effort to get out again, the changeless, toneless sound of Brant's whispering monologue on Neo-Babylonia; the whole tedious business was a distant, distorted blur, and every so often he heard Galloway say again, more and more distinctly—

"Why don't you stick around and have some small chop with Travers and me?"

This had been said to him! Hallam. The Norland beach assistant. Galloway had said it. Galloway. The district commissioner. And Galloway had gone on to say—

"So you see, Hallam," went on Brant, "the ancient Babylon of Hammurabbi was doomed for the last time. Cyrus was

coming. Cyrus the goat herder of the north who was going to sweep everything before him. Belshazzar saw the writing—"

Galloway had gone on to say that he could recommend Travers' liquor, small chop and army, and if he had not met Travers' wife—

"—no attention to it. Who were the Persians in any case? Just a lot of rough, ill mannered hillmen—goat herders who drank awful liquor and said their prayers to nothing or nobody that mattered. Belshazzar laughed at the very idea of an army of goat herders, led by just another goat herder—"

There was much more of it, but Hallam heard only vague snatches here and there; and afterward, in the quiet of his own room, looking out across the black face of Nana's Creek at the twinkling lights on the opposite bank, he tried to imagine what would have happened if he had accepted Galloway's invitation.

Perhaps Galloway, after all, had really meant to take him up to the barracks. Perhaps the district commissioner, being a government man and not a trader, did not understand the true situation and had actually wanted to be friendly and hospitable in spite of the trouble Norland had so frequently and viciously tried to make for him. Perhaps if he, Hallam, had gone up to the barracks with Galloway—perhaps—

Hallam's head throbbed after awhile. The ignominious loneliness that had been pressing down upon him for months, the sweltering drag of the days and the crushing isolation of the nights, with the faint sound of other men's laughter in his ears and the lights across the creek, mocking his hates, his desires and his spite driven ambitions—every single hour of it seemed to be compressed into a solid weight that beat upon his temples until his whole body shuddered and shrank from the threat of each successive blow.

"Damn him! He didn't even remember me! But he thought he'd have some fun with me—teach me to respect his ruddy authority and make me climb down! Climb down, hell! I'm going to climb up! And up! I'll show these ruddy swine—"

He choked on a sound that was perilously near a sob, swung away from the window and passed into an adjoining room, the door of which he opened with a key. Ultimately it would be occupied by another assistant, if Norland's beach ever needed another assistant. Meantime, Hallam used it as a gymnasium.

And without any more light than that afforded by the stand lamp in his own room, he began to produce sounds that undoubtedly bore a resemblance to the beating of a tom-tom; a faster and more vicious beat than any of the Kroo boys on the beach had ever heard. Hallam was letting off steam; and there never had been any question about his ability to handle a punching bag. Certainly no one would have questioned this ability of his on this occasion.

Tom-toms have voices that speak to the initiated. Hallam's punching bag talked to Hallam. Upon this night of nights it almost screamed.

And from out of the blackness downriver, the wailing scream of a siren answered it; the siren of a launch. Norland's.

A watch boy, listening under Hallam's window to the measured tattoo the "small boy first-timer" was playing upon the punching bag, hurriedly became a watch boy again and raced around to the oil yard where he feverishly rang six bells just to assure himself that he was attending to his job. The bell sounded like a fire alarm.

Brant, picking his way through the streets of Babylon in the wake of a conquering Persian horde, came scurrying back to Nana's Creek and went out to the veranda in the hope that there might be some mistake.

And Galloway, holding three aces, drew two cards.

"That's Norland," he growled, his eyes on the tiny light that was rushing upriver. "Now watch my luck go all to the devil."

Hallam alone rejoiced; Hallam, who believed he hated Norland more bitterly

than he hated the twinkling, mocking lights across the creek.

HALLAM did not see Norland that night. Nor did he see him next day. In the late afternoon of the second day after Norland's arrival, Hallam learned from a Kroo house boy who was obviously divulging galley or backstairs gossip, that Norland "catch plenty fever too much. Maybe so he go die."

The house boy looked as if he might regret being so free with information that was not supposed to be made public, but Hallam did not believe him in any case. Though Brant, at dinner the previous evening and at eleven o'clock breakfast that day, had looked a bit worried and seemed more absent minded than usual, he did not look worried enough. And though Hallam had been informed by his house boy from time to time, that Brant "savez medicine too much," he was sure Brant was not the sort who would be likely to take a responsibility of the kind on his shoulders when there was a doctor on the government beach.

That evening, however, Hallam dined alone. Brant sent word from his quarters that he would not be in to dinner; so Hallam sat at the head of the table wondering if it were possible that Norland had come back to the Grudge to die.

The Kroo boy stewards who waited at table certainly looked like paid mourners at the funeral of their best friend; and as this probably meant that they were worried about their pay, Hallam began to feel the effect of their gloom closing in upon him, too; and by the time dessert was reached he was almost willing to concede that Norland might be human after all. Human enough to die.

But why didn't Brant send for the doctor? And why all the mystery?

Of course, since the only doctor available was a government doctor, Norland might just be spiteful enough to want to deny a government man any kind of privilege—even the privilege of keeping him alive. But Brant did not have to accept that kind of responsibility unless he wanted to. In a case of the kind, with a man as sick as that on his hands, Brant was taking an awful chance and—Hallam beckoned the chief steward who stood, like a dark cloud of gloom, behind his chair.

"Norland plenty sick?"

"I no savez, sah," the Kroo boy said and gave every indication that he had no intention of being in the least communicative.

"What's the matter?" Hallam persisted quietly.

"I no savez, sah."

"He catch fever?"

"I no savez, sah."

Hallam looked the chief steward over and made a slow and unpleasant job of it.

"You're a liar. You know all about it."

"Me, I no lie, sah. I no savez lie palaver. Lie palaver be small boy palaver, and me, I be big man foh—"

"Shut up," Hallam interrupted briefly, and glanced at the lesser stewards who were trying to look altogether disinterested. "You lie. You lie all time. You no savez true mouf li'l bit. What's mattah Norland no catch doctah?"

"I—I no savez, sah."

"You fear you no catch pay suppose Norland go die?"

The whites of the steward's eyes gleamed in sudden, startled guilt, and he looked quickly about him as if he suspected one of his underlings of treachery.

"I—I no fear, sah."

"You lie. All man for this beach fear Norland go die. Maybe so doctor for government beach go fix."

Then Hallam abruptly rose and, with a significant glance all about him, left the room. He went out to the veranda instead of directly to his room as he always did and, apparently intent upon the far scattered lights on the river, listened to the low buzz of suppressed excitement that had leaped into life the moment he had left the dining room.

Presently, well aware of the fact that he was being watched, he went leisurely downstairs to the beach and walked in the

general direction of the waterfront. His intentions just then were vague. He resented being kept in the dark about something he was sure the Kroo boys knew all about, and he had an indeterminate pian in mind to try to make the chief steward or the beach headman excited enough to talk.

This was his idea when he walked down to the mangrove stick breakwater, but when he reached the waterfront and looked back at the dimmed lights in Brant's and Norland's room and made out the uncertain outline of Brant, who seemed to be watching him from behind one of the veranda uprights, his resentment suddenly increased a hundredfold.

They kept him in the dark, then spied upon him as if he were a burglar. Without even consulting him they would make him partly responsible for keeping Norland's sickness a secret, and watched him like hawks to be sure he did not send for a doctor!

It was, of course, Brant's duty to send for the doctor. But if Brant did not perform this duty, it was up to somebody with a sane sense of white responsibility to perform it for him. Why all the secrecy? Why all the whispering? Why—

Hallam spun toward the sound of a watch boy's dirge-like refrain that was coming slowly in his direction accompanied by the creaking of a hurricane lamp.

"Watch boy!"

"Yessah."

"Tell headman I want gig boat one time."

"Yessah."

The watch boy departed in the direction of the Kroo house, but Hallam knew he would pass the galley *en route*, and this simple fact, Hallam felt sure, would be productive of results somewhat different from the gig boat he had ordered.

Hallam was right. In a surprisingly short space of time the shadow-like figure of a diminutive house boy came out of the murk behind him, stood at his elbow and said—

"Cap'n want you, sah, foh topside."

Brant was the "cap'n" referred to, and he was called this because he was the boss. Hallam found him waiting for him at the top of the stairs.

"Where are you going?" Brant's whispering voice asked at once. "Why do you want the gig?"

"Nowhere in particular," Hallam lied easily. "I just thought I'd see if it was any cooler on the river."

Brant mumbled something under his breath, paused a moment, then added audibly:

"Never mind that now. I have some house accounts I'd like you to get ready for Friday's mail and—"

"Tomorrow, some time," Hallam interrupted tonelessly. "I have had a rocky sort of day of it, and I'd like to get away from the beach for awhile. How is Norland?"

"Norland?" Brant's whispering voice repeated the name as if he had never heard it before. "Why—er—oh, he's all right. He's been very busy. I'll send these accounts along to your room and—"

"Not tonight. I have—"

"Tonight, Mr. Hallam, if you please. Norland will want them in the morning."

Hallam hesitated. His mouth tightened. Then he smiled a slight, obliging smile.

"All right. If Norland's ready to look them over tomorrow morning, they'll be ready for him. Send the accounts along any time."

Brant regarded Hallam a moment or two with a dubious look of suspicion, then nodded, turned on his heel and disappeared into his office at the far end of the veranda.

THE HOUSE account books reached Hallam's room by messenger a few minutes later and remained unopened on Hallam's table all night. Brant sent for them in the morning and Hallam reported in person with the books tucked under his arm.

There was no one in Brant's office when he reached the doorway, but a low hum of voices emanated from a bedroom ad-

joining. One of those voices was Brant's, and another distinguishable voice sounded like that of the chief steward. Hallam thought there was a third voice, but he could not be sure about this. In any event the voice was not Norland's.

He went into the office as far as Brant's desk and laid the books down.

"I've brought the account books, Mr. Brant," he announced to the half open bedroom door.

Brant appeared hurriedly in the doorway and a dead silence had descended within the room behind him.

"Yes—oh—er—yes, thanks. Norland will look them over later."

Hallam inclined his head, turned and went out; and waited for Brant or Norland to send for him to find out why he had not made up the house accounts.

They did not send for him. He breakfasted alone and he dined alone, and felt like a solitary outcast amid an atmosphere of mystery and gloom. Even the Kroo boy laborers on the beach seemed to want to avoid being drawn into conversation, and the only friendly thing—the only really human contact he could think of was the memory of Galloway's invitation to small chop at the barracks. Of course, Galloway had only wanted to have some fun with him, but—

It was after nine o'clock when Hallam, dodging a watch boy on his rounds, slipped under the awning of an eight-paddle canoe that lolled alongside the Norland breakwater and gave the owner of the canoe the signal to get under way. He was reasonably sure he had made his arrangements for leaving the beach without attracting attention and he thought he would be able to engage Galloway in a brief, private conversation without making the fact known to everybody on the government beach.

He had convinced himself that he should take some sort of action in the matter if only to protect himself from any awkward complications later. And, in any event, he was tired of being imposed upon; tired of being used and lied to and of being the sacrificial goat on the altar of Norland's squabbles with the right bank of Nana's Creek.

Why shouldn't he be told what was wrong with Norland? What was the object of keeping him in the dark when every Kroo boy on the beach—

"Damn them! Do they think I mean less around their ruddy beach than a cook's mate!"

When the canoe ran alongside the government beach gig wharf, a colored policeman with a lantern glared down at the paddle boys and demanded:

"What's matter you bring so-so canoe 'longside dis wharf? Bushman! You no savez gig wharf be foh white man boat? Take um 'way one time!"

Then he saw Hallam's white shirted arm reach out from under the awning to grip the wharf rail, and he immediately backed away mumbling gutturals of apology. But when he saw who Hallam was the apologies were withdrawn and he demanded of Hallam personally:

"What's matter you bring so-so canoe foh dis wharf? You no savez—"

"Shut up," Hallam interrupted mildly enough, though the ugly twist of his mouth was not a thing to argue with. "Which place Galloway live?"

"*Cha!* You talk so foh me! Me, I be p'liceman foh gov'ment. You no savez dat? I be big man foh dis place. You be small boy white man from so-so Norland beach. How you—"

The thick voice of indignation halted with a grunt as Hallam's right snapped to the policeman's jaw, and the savage twist of Hallam's mouth was now emphasized and interpreted by a light in his eyes; a light that no one on Nana's Creek had ever seen. His right boot immediately indorsed the argument of his fist, and then his voice, pitched scarcely higher than a conversational level, asked almost politely:

"Where Galloway? I want um one time."

"Ye-yessah," the policeman gasped, protecting his jaw with his elbow and his retreat with the lantern. "We—we go dere. One time."

Hallam followed, ordering the canoe to wait for him. At the entrance to the administrative building, which housed several officials, including Galloway, on its second floor, a squat and powerful looking house boy barred the way with the query—

"Which place you go?"

"Where's Galloway's room?"

The house boy did not answer at once. He was looking inquiringly at the policeman who was carefully holding his lantern behind him. Hallam stepped past the policeman.

"Galloway's room. Savez? One time."

The house boy seemed to spread himself between Hallam and the stairs.

"Gall'way busy too much. Tomorrow time, maybe so, be all ri'."

"Where's his room?"

"He busy too—"

"Make quick, bushman. Galloway room, one time."

THE HOUSE boy gaped a moment, then let loose a string of Jakri invectives that he presently translated into pidgin English, the tirade ending with a pig-like sound as Hallam's left snapped at his nose, and his right sank almost leisurely into his solar plexus. A flick of Hallam's foot at his shins completely removed him from the unorthodox visitor's path just as a voice from the stairs called down—

"What in hell are you doing?"

Hallam looked up. A white man, in regulation service dinner clothes, was coming downstairs, three steps at a time. Hallam did not know who he was, but he could see that he was tall, rangy and young enough to be important.

"I'm looking for Galloway's room," Hallam said mildly. "Do you know—"

"He flog me! He kick me!"

The policeman's loud thick voice seemed to strike at the back of Hallam's neck, and the house boy's moaning became suddenly louder.

"What's that? He struck you, too?"

"Yes, sah. He flog me and he kick me, sah."

"I'm looking for Galloway's room. Do you—"

"Did you strike this policeman?" the man in dinner clothes asked peremptorily.

"We'll take that up later," Hallam said. "Meantime I'd like to have you direct me to Galloway's—"

"Confound you! Do you think you can come here and knock my policeman and my house boy—"

"Are they yours?" Hallam looked the man in dinner clothes over. "That probably accounts for them." He moved toward the other man as if he were walking down the aisle of a church. "Where's Galloway's room? Do you know?"

"Who the devil— Damn your impertinence! I'll make you pay sweetly for this. I'll—"

Hallam's twisted sneer seemed to go completely out of bounds. The light in his eyes leaped like a knife thrust out of the dark. And a smile followed it.

Perhaps it was the smile that made the man in dinner clothes pause. Perhaps he heard the sound of a door opening overhead. Perhaps he did not realize that a trader's assistant would dare to—

Hallam's left flicked the other man's cheek lightly as the touch of an egret feather; his right, an instant later, brushed his chin; and somehow, in the third second, Hallam was between his opponent and the stairs.

The blows were just part of a gesture, but the footwork was masterly. Galloway, leaning over the balustrade, could see that quite clearly, and he waited to see what Delton would do about it. Delton was the man in dinner clothes and Galloway knew he was no slouch. He knew how to take care of himself and he was heavier by at least twenty pounds; heavier, taller and with a longer reach. The odds were all with the police department, and it was Delton's job to—

Delton's expression, pose and immediate actions indicated that he was going to make a quick, short but thorough job of it. He closed with a rush and his left plunged viciously at Hallam's jaw. But he found that Hallam was inside that

left, that his right was tied up, while Hallam's right, free and unrestrained, snapped a hook to his chin that rocked him from head to heel.

Delton staggered and covered up, shook his head to clear it, straightened a little and tried to believe that the punch had been a lucky one and that his weakness was momentary and would pass. Hallam followed, smiling, and smiling, feinted Delton into the error of leading. Delton led; and Hallam seemed literally to pick the blow out of the air and wrap it around his neck.

A six-inch right to the jaw, a left and then the right again—Delton's knees buckled. There was a green, sick look of hopeless surprise on his face. Something had gone wrong. Too much quinine, perhaps. Something—Delton tried to cover up again, reeling sidewise in a sagging, drunken stagger, steadied himself and made a desperate show of turning his face and his fists head-on to disaster. Then something like a sledge hammer cracked against his chin and the floor came up and scraped his face.

There was a gray-black film over his eyes, and his arms and legs—damn them! Why didn't they get some life into them? He couldn't lie there and let a confounded trader's assistant— His head lifted a little and a little more, and he heard voices that whispered above him; voices that whispered and died away into silence as his head dropped suddenly and the floor came up and scraped his face again.

The Nana's Creek police department was out cold.

GALLOWAY stood at the foot of the stairs now, and Hallam, with his back to the gaping black policeman, the moaning house boy and the prostrate head of the Nana's Creek constabulary, was vaguely aware that other white men were making their appearance on the stairs asking loud voiced questions that nobody answered.

"He flog me! He kick me! He flog all man!"

The black policeman's voice tried to whine its complaint above the minor rabble of other voices, but Galloway paid no attention to him. His interest was entirely taken up with Hallam, who faced him so very quietly, his hands at his sides, as if they had always been harmless and inoffensive as they were then. Then Galloway turned his head.

"Shut up, you fellows, and get Delton up to his room! He'll be all right in a minute." Paying little heed to the babble of questions that followed, he looked toward Hallam and said briefly, "You come with me."

"Thanks."

Galloway led the way upstairs, leaving the others to care for Delton. Hallam, looking neither to right nor left, followed Galloway until the door of Galloway's room closed behind him, shutting out the voices that rumbled below. Galloway waved Hallam to a chair, picked up a pipe and matter-of-factly indicated cigarets in a tin at Hallam's elbow.

"No, thanks," Hallam said simply. "Not at the moment."

Galloway remained standing, filling the pipe and apparently giving all his attention to the proceeding which, with him, appeared to be something of an art.

"If you had accepted my invitation to go up to the barracks the other day," he said without looking at his visitor, "this would not have happened."

Hallam looked down at his boots. His arms, his legs, his shoulders suddenly felt limp and he had a queer, choking feeling in his throat; for all the world as if he might cry any minute. This was silly, of course. Damned silly. He had never cried in his life, not even—

He shook himself and looked up.

"I came here to talk to you," he said, and wondered if his voice were really as husky as it sounded.

"Yes?"

"And I came to you because that invitation of yours was the only—the only—Hell! Why should I whine to you?"

Galloway lighted the pipe, listened a moment to a commotion of voices in the hall outside, then sat down, crossing his

long legs as if he had all night to do it in.

"Do you know who that was you knocked out just now?"

"No."

"That was Delton, our commissioner of police. The house boy was Delton's too. Also, of course, the policeman." Galloway stroked his chin reflectively. "What encouraged you to pick on the police department in such wholesale fashion?"

Hallam hesitated and again studied his boots. He knew he was in a very serious situation, even though he did not know how serious it could be if Delton happened to be in the humor to look at it that way. And there was every chance in the world that Delton would be in just that humor.

"It got in my way," he said at last. "The policeman treated me like a paddle boy, the house boy did the same thing and Delton—well, he got ratty as hell and wouldn't tell me where your room was. None of them would. They got in my way and—and something cracked and I walked over them. I had to talk to you and they wouldn't—"

"I see—" mildly. "Are you in the habit of walking over things like that when they get in your way?"

"No. I haven't hit anything except a punching bag in nearly two years."

Galloway nodded.

"Well, you apparently haven't forgotten how. What did you want to see me about?"

Again Hallam hesitated. The rumble of voices in the hall seemed to be growing louder, black voices mixed with white.

"I came to you because—because—Never mind that now," he finished abruptly and shook himself again. "Norland's sick. Something mysterious. Brant won't tell me what it is. Nobody will. Everybody up there seems to know all about it; everybody but me. And when I try to inquire—to talk to anybody— I couldn't stand it any longer, and if a doctor is necessary, I thought—"

Galloway's sharp, penetrating look of inquiry halted him.

"A doctor?" Galloway exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes, I thought it would be advisable to—"

"But don't you know that Brant is a qualified M.D?"

Hallam's eyes almost leaped out of his head.

"Brant!" he repeated hollowly. "Brant!"

"Surely. Don't you know that? I thought everybody on Nana's Creek knew that. Brant used to be a medical officer in the government service before he decided to put his money on Norland. Hasn't he ever told you about it? His signature on a death certificate is still good."

Hallam stared at Galloway dully.

"Brant," he whispered again. "Brant! That whispering—" he stopped and shook his head hopelessly. "He never tells me anything; never talks to me except to quote yards of ancient history at me."

Galloway nodded.

"Still at it, is he?" He smiled slightly. "I think Brant chucked medicine for trade so that his reading wouldn't be interrupted so often. But I can't see why your Kroo boys should be so mysterious about Norland's sickness if they know anything about it. Are you sure they do know?"

HALLAM was not sure of anything now except that he had made a fool of himself; the worst possible kind of fool; the kind of fool who, if nothing more serious came of it, would be laughed right out of his job, the palm oil trade and the country. He had come down there, in secret and stealth, and had battered his way through "the police department" in search of a doctor when there was a perfectly good doctor right on Norland's beach!

Laugh! Nana's Creek would be laughing at him for weeks. Hallam could already hear that laughter, and visibly shrank from it just as a rather peremptory knock sounded on Galloway's sitting room door.

"All right, Delton," Galloway called. "Come in."

Delton came in and he was followed by half a dozen other men who were interested principally in getting a good look at the man who had knocked Delton out. The police commissioner looked somewhat pale and drawn, but otherwise seemed to have quite recovered and stood steadily enough on his legs. His expression indicated that he meant business.

Hallam had risen and now faced Delton quietly. Obviously he was not afraid of him either as a personality or as a police commissioner; and to him the others were just a smudge of perspiring faces in the background.

"All right, Galloway," Delton said in an official voice. "I'll relieve you of the responsibility of this young—"

"Just a minute, Delton." Galloway had also risen. His voice was mild and friendly. Very friendly. "I am afraid you have your facts twisted. I want you to meet my friend, Hallam—the namesake of an old friend of my schoolmaster's, and of mine, too, for that matter. We discovered each other just the other day and he was on his way to have a chat with me when one of your policemen and your house boy—"

"But, confound it, Galloway—"

"Just a minute, Delton. You see, my friend Hallam happens to have been fool enough, without knowing what he was doing, to sign on for Norland. He's Norland's assistant now, and your policeman and house boy thought they could take advantage of the fact. They were impertinent, Delton. They were insulting. They treated my friend like a damned pariah, Delton—like a ruddy bush dog to be kicked around according to their fancy. Unforgivable, Delton. Quite. And my friend Hallam hit out. So would I. So would you. So would—"

"But, damn it, Galloway, I won't have my uniformed men booted around the beach like—"

"Of course not, Delton. The idea is preposterous. The uniform must be respected, at all times, at all hazards. But so must my friends. As a matter of fact-Delton, you took a punch at my friend Hallam, yourself. You took several punches at him in fact, and I think you will concede that that's no way to welcome my friends when they come to see me." Galloway waited for the laugh, got it, paused to allow it to clear the atmosphere, then added, "If just one of those punches of yours, Delton, had ever landed on my friend Hallam's jaw—why, good Lord! If you don't learn to pull those punches of yours, Delton, you'll knock some poor devil's head right off his body one of these days!"

Again Galloway gave the expected laughter a chance to subside, saw that Delton did not seem to know what to think or to do, and then took the opportunity to conclude:

"It was only my friend's footwork that saved him, Delton. I saw that quite clearly. Quite. Now, if you two could get together and combine Hallam's footwork with your terrific punching ability, why, well, haven't you any imagination? Or does it need a little stimulation? I think it does. I think we all do. Just a minute—" and he raised his voice in a stentorian roar. "Boy!"

"Yessah." The answer came faintly from the regions where house boys lie in wait to answer summonses of the sort.

"All right, gentlemen. Shake hands with my friend Hallam and be seated. Come on, Delton. You're at the head of this parade. Shake hands with Delton and let's all have a drink."

"Galloway's right!"

"Bravo!"

"Go on, Delton. Be a good fellow!"

"That's the ticket!"

"Good stuff, Galloway!"

Hallam heard it all through a fog; saw Delton come undecidedly toward him, then saw the police commissioner stick out his right hand just as if some one had manipulated it with an invisible string. He knew he shook hands with Delton, but the others were just a kaleidoscopic blur of faces and dinner clothes, civil and military; a long nose and pale blue eyes, a short nose and bushy black eye-

brows, an ordinary nose and ordinary eyes and a shiny bald head—half a dozen or more faces that swam about in front of him; voices that talked to him and about him, hands that shook his and presently held glasses up to mouths that drank his health in sips and gulps; more white men than he had seen or talked to in over six months.

He did not know what he said to these men, nor could he remember much of what they said to him. But, after a while, the glasses were empty and the faces were gone; the door was closed again and he was looking at Galloway and Galloway was looking at him. The district commissioner smiled.

"I imagine Delton's still wondering what hit him."

Hallam tried to smile too.

"Why—why did you lie like that for me? I didn't deserve it. The last time I was down here I—"

"I know. So did I—once upon a time." Galloway reached for his pipe and rose. "When I was at school."

He emptied the pipe and refilled it, a whimsical, reminiscent smile lurking in the corners of his mouth. Hallam watched him as if the district commissioner had suddenly donned a halo.

"The cases are not parallel, exactly," Galloway said, applying a match to the bowl of his pipe. "But for various reasons public and private, I was at war with the world, and when my old schoolmaster tried to dig me out of myself by inviting me to go to the circus with him, I told him to go to Paris. And I didn't say Paris."

He smiled and sat down again.

"Of course, he should have tanned my hide, but he knew that had been tried too often and had done more harm than good. So he let me come home to roost in my own way. And I came." Galloway's grin broadened. "I belted the stuffing out of some of the town's choicest sons before I was very much older and as two of them were related to the provost of the place, I was headed for reform school in double quick time."

Hallam's expression was pained. His manifest dislike for the late provost of Galloway's home town would have been laughable if it had not been so sincerely intense. He sat up straighter in his chair, ready for anything.

"However, my schoolmaster friend intervened with the story that I should first be given my chance to do my duty for the honor of the school and the parish by entering the annual county competition for scholarships and prizes. And nothing I can say can make this as funny to you as it was to me and to the town in general. I'd never won a prize in all my life at school, except on the cinder track and in the gymnasium, and these county competitions had nothing to do with athletics. They were only for the kind of fellows I was in the habit of walloping."

Galloway laughed, then suddenly became serious again—very serious.

"But it was the county competitions or reform school, and to my shame be it reported I chose the county competitions."

Again he laughed, rose and stalked across the room to a small book case, and from the middle of a row, secured a book. There was nothing remarkable about the appearance of this book except that it was rather well preserved for a book that was obviously of somewhat elderly vintage. But he brought the book to Hallam and put it carefully into his hands.

"And there is the evidence of my shame; the beginning of an earnest and much less lively life."

Hallam laughed—an almost hysterical note, and his hands were trembling and his eyes had a mist in them as he read the title on the cover, "Europe During The Middle Ages," by Henry Hallam L.L.D., F.R.A.S.

He looked up quickly but found that Galloway was turning the pages of an illustrated weekly on the table. So he glanced at the title again, then opened the book, looked inside the front cover and found this:

Awarded to
ALEXANDER GALLOWAY

The Perthshire Association, Edinburgh,
At a Competition for Prizes held at Strathmyle
April 14, 1893.

Neither of them said anything for a minute or two. Then Hallam rose, edged the book back into Galloway's hand and, with his eyes on the moths and flies that clouded about the stand lamp, he said with a short laugh—

"I'm glad my name is Hallam."

GALLOWAY escorted him down to the gig wharf and the colored policeman with his lantern led the way. The policeman's expression would have been exactly the same if Nana's Creek had suddenly gone dry.

"Keep it dark," Galloway said, referring to his submerged past, and Hallam solemnly promised he would.

He arrived at Norland's beach shortly before midnight and found Brant waiting for him at the head of the stairs like a whispering voice of judgment.

"Where have you been?" Brant asked. "I have been looking for you."

"Down river, visiting some friends."

"Friends?"

"My friend Galloway in particular."

"Galloway!" The whispering voice was barely audible. Brant looked at his first-timer assistant with a queer and most unexpected eagerness. "Galloway?"

"Yes. The district commissioner. You know him, don't you?"

"Oh—" flatly. "I didn't know you knew him." Brant paused. "You—er—you didn't say anything to him about Norland, did you?"

"Why should I? Is there anything wrong with Norland?"

Brant stroked his chin and Hallam could see that he was going to be communicative only because he was compelled to.

"Norland's going home."

"Home? On leave, you mean?"

"No. For good."

Hallam stared.

"You mean he's so sick he can't come back?"

Brant did not answer at once. He was looking out toward the river and his thoughts were evidently none too hopeful.

"Maybe if they knew Norland wasn't coming back, we might— You say Galloway's a friend of yours?"

"A very good friend. But what—"

"Do you think he's a good enough friend of yours to forget your connection—" Brant jerked his head in the direction of his own quarters— "with *him?*"

Hallam stared again.

"I think he could be persuaded to forget that," he said with a lofty confidence that was the equivalent to a glass of very fine champagne. "But why all this mystery? What's happened to Norland and what do you want me to do?"

Brant nodded slowly; paused and nodded again. Then, with an absent jerk of his head, he beckoned Hallam to follow him. Walking on tiptoe without being aware of it, Hallam obeyed and they passed along the agent's end of the veranda, through Brant's office and into a bedroom that contained principally a mosquito curtained bed.

There was a man upon this bed; a lean faced man with a parchment-like skin and two sharp blue eyes that were wide open and restless as the darting flight of a dragon fly. This man looked like Norland, but the wild unreasoning light in his eyes, and the straps that bound him to the bed—

"My God!" Hallam breathed and gripped Brant's arm. "What—what did *that?*"

Brant shook his head solemnly, looked down at the figure upon the bed and said in his whispery voice that seemed suddenly to have acquired new strength:

"Fever and liquor, fighting and the sun. Mostly the fighting. I told him a year ago to go home and rest up; that he'd burn himself out one of these days. But he said the fight was the wine of

life to him." Brant paused. "He came back a few nights ago whimpering like a frightened infant, hanging on to his reason with the help of brandy and quinine, and running a temperature of a hundred and four." Brant shrugged his shoulders slightly and shook his head. "I thought he was delirious at first, but it wasn't that. The fever went out of him but the frightened infant had become—well, you can see for yourself." He plucked at Hallam's sleeve and pointed to the bed. "Is *that* Norland? Is *that* the horse I put my money on?"

Abruptly, before Hallam could frame any kind of reply, Brant led him from the room and out to the veranda again. Hallam was not sorry. The look in Norland's eyes—

"We'll put him on the first steamer that comes upriver," Brant said. "And then we'll—you're sure Galloway is a very good friend of yours?"

"Yes, I'm sure of that. Isn't he a friend of yours?"

"Well—er—not so much. Not since I left the service. He told you I used to be—"

"Oh, I knew all about that." Hallam lied quite easily.

"Hunh." Brant looked downriver again in the direction of the government beach. "You see, I believed in Norland, and when I put my money on him, I stood by him and indorsed what he did and what he said and—er—well, he said and did a great many things that Galloway and the others probably remember."

Brant turned his head, smiling one of his rare smiles.

"But if Galloway's a very good friend of yours—a really good friend—" Brant paused and stroked his chin and looked up at Hallam speculatively— "perhaps he'd let you have that strip between Barlow's and the government beach?"

"Me? That strip—you mean—you mean you want to move across the creek!"

"I want to if we can get that strip. I've always wanted to. But Norland always said—but what does it matter what he said? This side of the creek has finished him. Broken him up. You've seen him. Isn't that argument enough?"

Hallam thought it would have been if he had needed any persuasion of the sort. So he nodded and tried to conceal his eagerness under a cloak of interested inquiry.

"I understood you to say that you wanted me to go to Galloway about that strip? Does he own it?"

"No. But the government does. And Galloway is the government on Nana's Creek. Do you think you can get it? I'll make you agent in another year if you do. Do you think you can?"

Hallam paused. He found that he was shivering. Also, paradoxically, that there seemed to be air cushions under his feet. And he was sure that when he told Galloway the story—

"Do you think you can get it?" Brant repeated with an unusual display of anxiety and impatience. "I'll give you a new contract right away if you do. Do you think you can?"

Hallam nodded slowly.

"I'm sure I can—as sure as my name is Hallam."

A Story of a Prison Break

THE BLUE WALL

By WILLIAM CORCORAN

IN EVERY prison where long term felons spin out their grim and futile lives, there is a Blue Wall. It is not a barrier of granite and cement: visitors will look for it in vain; mention of it will evoke a grin or a shrug. In fact, it is not a wall at all. But because freedom beckons on the other side it is inevitable that imprisoned men should think of it, speak of it, and even dream of it, as a wall. It has this in common with veritable walls: it can be scaled. Occasionally a prisoner who has reached the end of his tragic tether makes good his escape over the Blue Wall, and thereafter his name is spoken along the corridors in whispers of envy and awe. It is a way of escape.

In the old days Graymoor Prison had no slogan—excluding those traditional and unprintable tags which circulate among the cells—but if it had, Warden Thomas McCloud would have repeated on all possible occasions—

"There are no escapes from Graymoor!"

A great number had tried to escape, to be sure, and some had maintained the

status of fugitive for weeks on end. But they had all come back. Even Tip Ransom came back, and the break Tip engineered is classic in the annals of escape. Yet following that famous episode Warden McCloud would have ceased to utter his slogan, were it his habit to utter slogans. There are things about that break which McCloud has never explained to his own satisfaction, things which one day may very likely explain themselves—but long after McCloud has passed on. Graymoor was built to endure forever, and doubtless will stand for fifty years to come at least.

Tip Ransom told every one, warden, keepers, and convicts, that he intended to escape. That was on his arrival at Graymoor. Later he refrained from telling them, for he grew wiser. Con Gallagher knocked some sense into his head one morning in the boiler room below the chair factory, and thereafter they were friends; and Ransom's education began. He was a man quick to learn and slow to forget.

"Lay off acting tough," Con told him. "That ain't your racket. The screws'll only laugh at you and rub it in, and the old-timers here'll take you for a ride. You got a good face; cultivate it. Work like hell, act meek and keep your eyes open. Talk as much as you want, but don't say nothing and don't trust nobody here."

The last bit of advice Tip Ransom could readily take to heart. He did not trust Gallagher, though he palled with him. Tip was a gambler, and his profession had not fostered trust in people. Despite this, he had trusted one woman. Perhaps because of it he had placed in her hands all the trust he could ever feel. When it proved misplaced Tip murdered a man. The commonwealth sent him to Graymoor for a natural—for life. And Tip Ransom had no more trust to give any one.

Tip had first been put to work on the coal pile, the usual thing for beginners. That accounted for his meeting Gallagher. Con Gallagher was an engineer and he ran the boilers. It was a practise of Warden McCloud's to shift convicts from job to job at intervals, to prevent them from plotting or consolidating unscheduled privileges. Very logically Tip was installed in the prison offices after his initiation, and there his deft hands proved so useful in filing papers and disposing of routine that he retained the post for many months. He was there when McCloud ordered a housecleaning. Ancient, bulging files of duplicate records, orders, bills, were to be cleared out and burned. Tip tossed stacks of dusty, brittle papers into wicker baskets and carried them down to the boilers. On each trip he chatted with Gallagher a moment while the refuse roared to ashes on the coals.

On his last trip Tip remained talking a little longer. Their talk was of nothing important; they stood side by side staring at the flames. Once or twice Tip shot quick side glances at the big engineer. He licked his lips as though wanting to speak of something very important. Con finally grinned at him, saying out of the side of his mouth from habit:

"Better get back, boy. The Man'll be looking for you. I'll see you in the yard at recreation."

"Yeah," said Tip morosely.

But he did not move. Suddenly he looked around. No one was near. He thrust a hand inside his coarse prison coat and pulled forth a crackling folded paper.

"Cache this," he snapped. "I daren't keep it. Found it in the old files."

Con Gallagher slipped it swiftly into his own coat.

"O. K., kid," he said. He walked casually away, looking at the steam pressure. Ransom hurried back to the office.

A quarter of an hour later Gallagher, alone in a corner behind the boilers, unfolded the stiff heavy paper. One side of it was a faded blue, crossed with white lines in orderly geometric formations alongside which there were figures and names. Gallagher was an engineer. He whistled softly.

"Sweet jumping Judas!" he said. And that was all he said. His small blue eyes were gleaming brightly as he considered

many possibilities of great consequence to Con Gallagher.

Recreation came at 2:30 P.M. For two hours the fifteen hundred inmates of Graymoor had the run of the great bare enclosure within the walls. Mostly they spent this time walking in pairs or small groups. Everywhere they talked, ardently and incessantly. A few walked alone, but even these talked to themselves: they were the stir bugs, the nuts who "had missed too many boats".

Ransom and Gallagher paced together in the shadow of the west wall. Gallagher strode easily, his great frame rolling like a hogshead on giant hams. His hands hung loose at his sides, long brown hairs curling down over the knuckles and on the fingers. His bright blue eyes were smiling and his wide, oddly pale lips were smiling. Gallagher always smiled, even when he was angry, so that it was extremely difficult to tell just what he was thinking. Not even Ransom could be sure, though he gave him frequent, intense looks now as they talked.

TIP RANSOM had been called dapper outside, and even here the muddy gray prison garments could not entirely stifle a certain innate fastidiousness. He was a well proportioned man, a little below average height. His face was slender, the mouth sensitive, and his wide, dark eyes vividly alert to outward impressions. It was the face of a man of too few scruples and too much thought. His voice was quick, precise, with not many inflections.

"Got that safe?" he asked as soon as they were out of earshot of others.

"You bet!" said Gallagher.

"What do you think of it?"

"Well—can you read a blueprint?"

"Never have. But I can learn if necessary."

"I can," said Con Gallagher. "I been a stationary engineer on construction jobs long enough to know up from down in a pinch."

"Yeah? Well, what do you think of it?"

A shade of irony entered Gallagher's smile.

"It gives some lovely cross-sections of the walls. I never knew just how thick they were. It might help to know that they're exactly twenty-two inches."

"Tear off that part and throw it away," said Ransom. "Got it with you?"

Something crinkled when Con touched his breast.

"Right here, son!"

Ransom looked around. On the wall above them a guard lounged near his little house. A rifle leaned against the railing beside him. He was watching the convicts at liberty. He had no need to watch the other side of the wall where the river rippled by, visible to the inmates only through the heavy grille gate leading to the prison dock.

"Let's cross the yard," said Ransom.

They changed their course without altering their mechanical stride. It was a large yard, half enclosed by prison buildings, half by granite walls twenty-five feet high and patrolled at intervals by guards day and night. Within the yard were a number of other buildings housing the factories, mess halls and store sheds. They were all uniformly drab and depressing.

Ransom steered toward a low frame structure where a six-ton prison truck was housed. The truck was out and the doors were wide open. No one was within at the moment. It would be safe to enter, providing they did not stay too long. They would be observed without a doubt, but nothing would come of it so long as they reappeared quickly and nothing was reported stolen later.

"In here," said Ransom. "Let me see it again."

Gallagher cast a covert look around, followed Tip into the garage and snapped the blueprint from his coat. He held one end, gave Tip the other to hold, and with his free hand traced an explanation along the white lines. Tip listened, understanding perfectly. They went over the entire prison plan. The print was a duplicate made at the time of its construction and

forgotten in the old files. It was something never intended for convict eyes, yet it is doubtful if McCloud would have worried greatly could he have known that a pair of his restless charges were studying it at this moment. Rifles, machine guns, a great alarm siren, and a guard force trained to military vigilance are effective antidotes to worry.

"Put it away," Tip said presently. "You can keep it better than I can. I'll have to think it over."

"What have you thought so far?" asked Gallagher. He was grinning. "You writing yourself a back gate parole, or just taking up architecture?"

"I'm blowing this joint, Con," said Tip. He looked at the big man. "You coming with me?"

"Show me the way! I don't ask no more. Boy, I been over that thing this afternoon twenty times and I don't see the combination yet, short of climbing up my own chimneys with a parachute!"

Tip smiled thinly.

"I don't either, yet. But it's there."

"O. K., boy! You find it, and you can count on me."

They walked out of the shed side by side, in their eyes the suppressed, hot flame of imminent freedom.

To Tip Ransom the recollection of that plan was an image in his mind's eye that glowed brightly day and night. His brain was trained to remember details, and it remembered these. Each time his gaze swept over the great prison, every line of masonry it encountered became a thin white penmark on a blue sheet. Yet like a puzzle at once obvious and clever, his problem defied solution. Somewhere just beyond his grasp there was an answer. He persisted in search of it. Con Gallagher frankly acknowledged defeat; the plan served only to assure him the more of the impregnability of Graymoor.

The world can tacitly assume that every convict has two emotions in common with his fellows, regardless of his crime or his previous estate. One is a desire for freedom, a gnawing, aching desire that permits no peace and remains always the criminal's greatest punishment. The other is suspicion, a distrust of everybody, everything, every day.

Tip Ransom was in a fever of hope and anxiety at this time. Since his entry months before he had watched for a loophole in the defenses built about him. None had ever appeared until now. He had planned to take advantage of any opportunity alone, but he knew at first sight of the precious blueprint that it was hopeless without additional help. It had taken a struggle, but he decided quickly and had given the paper to Con. There was not another man in Graymoor with whom he would have ventured to do as much.

HE WATCHED Con Gallagher closely during the days that followed. In a way the possession of the paper put the other to a test. No man knew who among his fellows were the informers who broke plot after plot before they fairly got under way. Con's continued possession of the plan spoke well for his trustworthiness. Tip asked to see it each day to make sure, and cringed every time a keeper came near, half expecting any moment to hear the dread summons. A convict in trouble was literally called on the carpet. McCloud had a small square of green carpet before his desk—one foot square, to be exact.

The unfortunate stood there for questioning, and there he remained until the warden was satisfied, if it took a day and a night. Tip had heard of it and something chilled inside him to think of it. There was a grim stubbornness in Tip Ransom that would deliver him to endless torture if ever he fell afoul of the powers that ruled him. Tip knew it—knew it fully as well as he knew that the man who betrayed him in Graymoor would die with a blade slid between his ribs.

Tip Ransom wanted to get out, and nothing could receive any consideration beside this. There was not much to go to when he was out, but that did not matter. There was a woman for whom two men

had ceased practically to exist. She was outside, and she probably laughed when she thought of them, one buried in a grave, the other in a cell in Graymoor. Tip's soul burned and writhed in torment behind the mask that was his face, and he looked ceaselessly for that loophole to liberty.

One day a week after his discovery of the blueprint Tip left the office and walked to the boiler room. The guards were accustomed to seeing him go about on errands and he was not molested. A couple of convicts were busy at the fires; he drew Gallagher aside.

"I must see that right away," Tip said. "Got it here?"

Con led the way to a corner alongside the coal bunkers. He made sure they were unobserved, and took the paper from its hiding place between two short boards thrust in between the wall and the planks of the bunker where it was kept dry and clean.

Incautiously Tip opened the plan. His eyes went immediately to a certain detail. His finger followed a narrow pair of parallel lines from the buildings on the east side of the yard, across it, through the west wall, to an abrupt end against a ragged line outside the enclosure.

"That's the river, ain't it, Con?" asked Tip, indicating the ragged line.

"Yeah. And that's a sewer," Con said, pointing to the parallel lines.

"Funny!" said Tip. "Where does it lead from?"

Con studied the plan, frowning in concentration.

"Looks like it don't lead from nowhere! But lemme think; there used to be a kitchen in the main building that ain't been used since the mess hall was put up. That's years ago. It was before my time too when they put in the new sanitary system. This don't give half what's in Graymoor. Tip, why'n hell didn't you pinch a new one when you took the trouble to steal some plans?"

"To hell with new ones! Con, this was on my mind all night. There's our chance. That sewer's abandoned. Reach it—and out we go!"

"Yeah?" said Gallagher. "How, by taking a bath and slipping through the drain?"

Tip ignored the ironic question. His eyes were glued to the print. He calculated distances. The course of the sewer could be plotted out in the yard. He spoke swiftly, and Gallagher listened, skeptical but not unwilling.

At recreation that afternoon the guard atop the center of the west wall found something to beguile the monotonous hours. He watched the two men in the middle of the yard. His ultimate conclusion was that the warden would have two more stir bugs to deal with.

Tip and Con started from the south side of the yard at a certain point and walked with precise, mincing steps directly north. Suddenly they stopped. The guard failed to notice their covert glances at him, but he did see the windy argument which followed, accompanied by many gesticulations. And how was an idly interested guard to know that the argument was purely for his benefit, and that the small pile of pebbles scratched together at that spot marked a carefully estimated distance from the south wall, the distance at which ran an old and forgotten sewer?

The pair checked their survey from the north wall, and found it correct to a negligible matter of inches. They repeated the process from both walls at different points, and soon were able to trace an invisible line across the yard directly above the sewer. Their calculations were not as simple as they sound, for the line included a bend in the sewer. Its purpose was not clear, but it was there plainly on the plan. It occurred out in the middle of the empty yard, so it did not matter. Their greatest concern was with some point nearer the source of the sewer where there were buildings. It would be manifestly impossible to dig to it in the open. They plotted the first leg of the sewer before recreation ended, and carried away with them an exact knowledge of every

structure rearing above the duct. And each lay awake long after "lights-out," thinking.

It was Tip who plotted the venture and directed the subsequent proceedings. He figured it out before he went to sleep that night. At one point along that invisible line there was a small work shed. It was the only logical point of attack. In it the carpenters and painters foregathered, and there the paints and tools were stored. There was a work bench and lathe and three inmates were constantly occupied there. By far the greatest problem ahead was that presented by the three convicts. Next day Tip asked Con about them. A shrewd gleam appeared in Gallagher's eye.

"Two of 'em's O. K," he said. "The other's a rat. If you got to depend on them, the plan's out."

"No need," said Tip. "Listen! I'm going to get in that shop. I won't have a chance while the three stick there. One will have to quit. Can you do anything about it?"

"Hm," murmured Con, looking at Ransom. "Hm," he uttered again. "I think I can!"

"Good. It wouldn't look good for me to have anything to do with it. Wait till I give you the office."

"Tell me when," said Con.

THAT afternoon Tip humbly presented himself to The Man, as Warden McCloud was called, and asked for a change of occupation. Tip's presence in the office made this possible. It would have been much more dangerous for Tip to submit his request through the regular channels, for the principal keeper has his ear just a little bit closer to the ground and might refuse a reasonable request on the grounds that anything a prisoner wanted was a good thing to deprive him of. Warden McCloud expressed genial satisfaction with Ransom's work in the office, but the superintendent of prisons had been around that day and had complimented him and McCloud was in a beneficent mood.

"There ain't a man needed anywhere, Ransom," he said. "I won't let you go now. But when something you like turns up you can remind me of it if you want. What have you done outside?"

McCloud was aware that Ransom was a gambler by profession, but few men lack some side experience. Tip told the warden that his father had been a cabinet-maker and that he was familiar with tools —carpenter's tools. He had done a few other odd things, but guessed that he could fit in anywhere that tools came in handy. McCloud nodded and dismissed him.

Ransom promptly got word to Gallagher to go ahead.

Next day a ripple of interest ran through Graymoor Prison. There had been a fight at breakfast in the corridor outside the mess hall. It had lasted only a moment, but Slim Johnson had been thrown down and his arm broken. Six inmates testified that he had made an unprovoked attack on the man who promptly had ruined him. Gallagher, though he did not offer testimony, was an absorbed spectator from a distance of fully thirty feet. During the fracas, and even after when the guards had rushed to the spot, his smile remained unchanged.

Shortly after, Tip Ransom was called to the warden's office. He put in a prompt and respectful appearance.

"A lucky coincidence, Ransom," McCloud told him heartily. "That fool Johnson started something this morning at breakfast, and got himself crippled for his pains. He's in the hospital now. We'll have to replace him in the carpenter's shop. Want the job?"

"Yes, sir," Ransom said modestly. "I think I can handle it."

"Good!" said McCloud. "We'll give you a try."

When Ransom was at the door the warden called him back. He looked at the prisoner thoughtfully.

"You didn't have anything to do with this by some chance, did you ?" he asked dryly.

Horror flashed across Ransom's pale face.

"No, sir! I didn't even see it. I only heard a few minutes ago."

The warden nodded and dismissed him again.

Tip was genuinely frightened by that chance question of the warden's. Such officials live by being smarter than their charges, and McCloud had bossed Graymoor for a long time. Did he suspect? Was he permitting the conspiracy to mature so that he might nip it at its ripest? There were a hundred appalling possibilities.

Gallagher was reassuring.

"Forget it," he said. "Johnson himself don't know exactly what happened. They can't tie that to us."

"How did you fix it?" Tip asked.

"That's something one of us can forget quicker than two," Con told him. "Somebody done me a little favor in return for another little favor. That's all."

So Tip Ransom was installed in the carpenter shop and had time to think of nothing for the next few days other than his effort to conceal as far as possible his utter ignorance of carpentry.

The other two who spent the work day in the shop were old-timers, hardbitten, caustic and discreet. They quickly perceived Ransom's ignorance, but said nothing. Time enough to complain to the P. K. when they discovered his racket, if any. There was none in sight. Tip was too earnestly bent on mastering his new trade. They watched him.

"Say, bozo," said Macklin, a tall, lean, wire muscled man with a long, hard jaw, "you been here three days now and the mystery only gets deeper. What's the idea of turning down a snap like that office job and coming in here?"

Ransom looked at him. He had been observing the two men, studying them, asking questions about them outside. But he was not yet sure.

"It ain't so much of a snap to be alone with a lot of screws all day," he explained. "Try it yourself some time."

"No thanks!" said Boone, a slender, volatile individual. "This is good enough for me. Get on with your work. It suits us so long as you do."

Ransom smiled, and persevered in his labors. The pair helped him, deciding to take him for granted after all. Gallagher, the big guy over in the boiler room, had been there as long as either of them, and he passed the word that Tip was O. K.

Tip observed that the shed was at its busiest during the first hour in the morning, which was from nine to ten o'clock. From ten to twelve it was not often disturbed, for no one dreamed that three inmates working in a tiny shack in the middle of the prison yard would find mischief to do. At noon the painters began returning, and lunch followed immediately after. From one to two-thirty all were at work again, but rarely an afternoon passed that a keeper did not drop in. The tools were checked in and out, of course, but that mattered little. The keeper in charge was casual about it, and other duties took him elsewhere during the precious morning hours. For two hours a day, then, other things permitting, Tip could work on the sewer with even chances of success.

One morning Tip observed that his two companions were excited in a subdued, smouldering way. Not a word was said while the others were about, but as soon as the three were alone Macklin came to him.

"We're counting in," he said. "When does the blow-off happen?"

Tip put down the strip of steel on which he was working. His simple carpentry, making boxes, repairing chairs and cabinets, had been laid aside for the moment while he continued the slow process of fashioning a four inch, razor sharp blade from a piece of scrap covertly salvaged. Tip looked at the eager Macklin and was chill inside, chill and hard.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Come across!" The other grinned. "You need us in. Con told us all about it."

"He did, eh? What did he tell you?"

Macklin disclosed his full knowledge of

the plot while Boone grinned from where he stood at the bench. They were delighted with the idea, and confident of its success. Tip nodded and returned to his shiny piece of steel.

"O. K," he said. "You're in. We'll begin tomorrow."

Tip made it his business to find an errand that took him past the boiler room half an hour later. He carried a small tool box to disguise his purpose, which was purely to see Gallagher and demand an explanation.

"The hell!" Gallagher laughed, his eyes bright and hard. "Of course I let them in on it. You couldn't leave them out, could you? They're regular, they're right guys. Forget about it!"

"You two-ton washout, I'm running this job!" snapped Ransom, white with rage. "Keep your hands off it, except when I tell you. I'm not risking solitary for your sake."

Gallagher looked at him, his smile gone. He came near.

"Nor am I for you, lily white! Get off that wave you're riding."

Ransom whipped from his sleeve the thin, gleaming blade. Gallagher saw it and stopped. For an instant they stood immobile, looking into each other's eyes. Then Gallagher lashed out a vicious sudden fist. The knife came up to meet it, but too late. The fist struck Ransom's arm and paralyzed it. The blade fell to the floor, and Ransom staggered back. Gallagher sprang in and seized the smaller man by the throat. He forced him against a wall. Two firemen looked on from across the room with casual interest.

"You rat!" said Gallagher. "For two cents I'd reach down inside that loud mouth of yours and pull you inside out." Ransom said nothing. His dark eyes were hot as molten metal. Gallagher continued to hold him for a moment, then let him go. The big man shrugged, brushed his hands, and turned away. After two steps he turned back. He stood looking at Ransom, who had not stirred.

"You're crazy, fella," he said, "and so am I. We're both crazy to fight at a time like this. Let's get over it." He thrust out a hand. His faint, tight smile had reappeared as quickly as it had gone.

Ransom, after a moment, returned the grip, and then walked out of the room.

THE SEWER was fourteen feet below the surface of the yard. It was a sixteen inch square conduit. A shaft at least two feet square would have to be dug to meet it. An enormous amount of earth must be disposed of during the process—and that within a prison where a bare fistful of raw earth would instantly advertise the break. Tip Ransom's two companions were keenly interested in learning how he proposed to go about this.

Tip laughed sourly as he explained it all to them that morning. Days of thought had resulted in a plan. They would cut a section out of the floor immediately beneath the bench. A box, loose boards, the usual clutter beneath a work bench, would cover the hole, and shavings would disguise any sign of its presence beneath. One man at a time would dig. Beneath the floor there was a good twelve inches of space: a great deal of the excavated earth could be shoved into this fortunately empty area. This would expedite the first stage of the operation. When there was no more room, earth could be carried out in pocketsful and thrown into the fireboxes of Con Gallagher's boilers. This must be done with care, so that the firemen would not notice.

The later work would necessarily be slow, since the removal of the earth must be so cautiously conducted. It would be a matter of weeks, perhaps months.

"Boy, I don't know how I'll last that long," said Boone. "McCloud ain't never lost a man yet. Makes me feel superstitious." He smiled a sickly smile.

"Pipe down!" snarled Tip. "You wanted in—and you stay in."

"Who says I wanted out?" demanded Boone.

Tip glared, then turned away without answering. His nerves were on edge and

he knew it. But distrust of these men was like acid in him.

The work began next morning. Tip Ransom started the hole after Macklin swiftly cut an opening in the floor just large enough to slide through. There was no shovel, no pick, but there were chisels and pieces of flat board and the ground was loamy and soft. Tip worked swiftly, shoving the earth into the far corners of the space beneath the floor. He worked as long as he dared. Inside of two hours he was almost able to stand erect in the darkness. He came out cramped and tired and sweaty, but grimly content. The gate to freedom was yawning open.

No one on the outside will ever know what Tip Ransom went through in the weeks that followed. On him rested the chief responsibility, and in the event of discovery the largest punishment would descend on him. At any moment while he worked a keeper might walk into the shop. Any of the others could purchase immunity at the first sight of danger by betraying the plot. There would be no immunity of any kind for Ransom.

Every waking moment was spent either in digging the shaft and disposing of the earth, or in watching for some sign of failure. Tip's ears were attuned to a single note which might be struck in the raucous medley of banter along the cell corridors during the morning count, to a single significant whisper which might come from some intimate's still lips in the silence of meal time, to the long conversations and plaintive songs which whiled the time in the cells just before lights-out. When he slept it was fitfully, and he dreaded the dreams that visited him in the darkness. He never met a keeper's eye but that something inside him trembled and his hand itched for the feel of the thin blade that he now carried between layers of leather in the sole of one heavy shoe.

Tip was in the hole one morning, digging steadily with a stolen candle burning on a splinter of wood beside him, when he heard a heavy footstep in the doorway overhead. Another foot kicked the box casually into place over the opening in the floor. A rumbling voice murmured a hardboiled greeting and inquired after the state of things in the carpenter shop. Macklin's calm voice replied that all was well. After a passage of words the voice spoke Tip's name. Where was he? Boone stated that he was gone on an errand in the chair factory. There was a grunt of noncommittal acceptance, and after a few more words the visitor departed. It was the P. K. on a personal tour of inspection.

Tip climbed from the hole white and shaking. He cleaned his hands quickly and got to work at the bench. He was waiting for the P. K. to return. He waited three days before descending the hole again. Evidently the principal keeper believed the story or had forgotten it.

Another time when Tip had visited the boiler room and tossed several fistfuls of earth over the ashes below one of the grates, where Gallagher later would mix it thoroughly with a slice bar, one of the firemen followed him outside. Tip did not turn, though he knew the man was behind him. As he entered the shed Tip shot a single word of warning at Boone and Macklin. He was busy with his tools when the fireman sauntered through the door. The fireman's presence here was as dangerous as a stick of dynamite, for it was irregular and subject to the inquiry of any passing keeper. The man leaned against the door jamb and grinned.

"What's going on here anyway?" he asked.

Macklin looked at him. He knew the man.

"We're making a coupla coffins," he said with short clipped words. "Just in case. You never can tell, you know."

The fireman's eyes narrowed. He looked around in mock count of the shed's occupants.

"A couple? Better make it three, hadn't you?"

There was an interval of silence following this. Then the fireman spoke again.

"Raw dirt!" he said. "Now where can that come from? I'm curious as hell. Maybe the P. K. could tell me." And he

smiled, for he held the whip and he knew that they knew it.

And so a fifth man was counted in on the break.

Tip Ransom watched Gallagher closely. The big man was an enigma. Macklin, Boone and the fireman Slade were transparent: ordinary criminals whose loyalty was held only by their own desire for freedom. Gallagher was different; his eternal smile told the world nothing and his hearty assurance concealed the far from simple workings of his mind. He had five years to go—a well timed betrayal of an escape plot might reduce that to one, or two. He had a good job in the prison, one of the few that were permanent. He risked a great deal. He was known through Graymoor as Tip Ransom's pal. But Tip watched him.

The shaft beneath the carpenter shed now plunged deep into the earth. A makeshift ladder permitted entrance. In the wall of the shaft there was a line of wooden splinters thrust into the loam. Each represented one foot of progress.

ONE MORNING close to two months after he had first bitten into the soil Tip Ransom emptied a tin bucket at the top of the ladder, tossed it back and opened a folding rule. Ignoring the markers in the wall he measured the depth from the level of the ground to the bottom of the shaft. He had said nothing during the past week of his progress. The rule informed him that he had driven his shaft to a depth of sixteen feet. The sewer lay fourteen feet below the surface, according to the blueprint. Tip cursed silently, unable to endure the thought of failure at this advanced stage.

They saw the look on his face when he came up. Macklin asked him what was wrong. He told them. And then he turned his vitriolic mood upon them. In their shifting eyes he could see treachery rising from a spark to a flame.

"One peep outa either of you and the mark goes on you!" he told them. His voice was low, but it had the edge of a Damascus blade. "No rat will live in this joint. You're in, and in to the end. Don't forget it!"

They snarled at him, but the moment passed. It was no time for bluster or argument. Death walked between them, and they all recognized the Presence.

Nothing was done on the shaft for a few days. Tip dared not enter it for fear that he would be trapped there by the others. Gallagher alone smiled his smile and encouraged him to persevere.

"Cut side tunnels," he advised. "We're not surveyors; we made a little mistake, that's all. Go on and get back to work!"

Tip could not say to Gallagher the things he found it easy to say to the others. He was silent, brooding for a day, and then abruptly he entered the shaft and hacked furiously at a tunnel toward the east. On the second day his steel bar clanked hollowly against something hard. He clawed the earth away and uncovered the flat, mottled side of the square conduit. No one but the two carpenters was above. Tip drove the bar at the baked clay of the conduit wall. At first it resisted, then it crumbled. He smashed an opening large enough for a man to enter. A draft of air, foul beyond description, seeped past him into the shaft. He thrust the candle into the orifice. Right and left the narrow duct yawned to darkness, clogged with sodden waste, damp and evil.

Tip blew out the candle and scrambled back up the ladder with his heart pounding mightily in exultation. The way was open, the dream of months was fulfilled!

A week passed before anything more was done. After months of waiting, a few days could not matter. Yet they were days of torment. The greed for freedom possessed them. Tip moved like a tiger among the conspirators, snarling at them, showing his claws, keeping them in line. Gallagher was as imperturbable as ever, but the other three were panicky and impatient. Tip's plans were matured.

"We'll wait for rain," he told them, "and until it rains you might as well take it and like it. We have to go out during

the day, and we can't hit the river in full sunlight. The harder it rains the better. The guard on the wall will be in his house and water will be streaming on the windows. He won't look to the river then."

Six tense, endless days passed, and then it rained. The sky was gray at 6 A.M. when Tip's cell corridor was roused for the morning count. At eight o'clock, while they were in the mess hall, the rain began. Tip felt the eyes of the four others steadily on him. They passed out of the hall into a steady windless drizzle. Tip looked for the four pairs of eyes and nodded to each. They understood.

At eleven the rain was falling with increased intensity. The air was chill, for fall was on the way. Gallagher and Slade arrived at the shed five minutes apart, breathing hard and silent. They were all under a tension that was close to the snapping point.

Tip dropped his tools, walked to the door of the shed and looked outside. He continued to look into the yard for several minutes. It was empty of life; every one was under cover this morning. The guard on the west wall could be seen as a blur in his streaming cubicle.

"O. K!" said Tip, spinning about. "Let's go!"

Macklin kicked the box aside and uncovered the opening in the floor.

Immediately and unreasonably an argument developed. Slade and Boone spoke together, using the same words. They raised a point of precedence. Who was going first and who last? Tip glared at them, speechless with rage. Gallagher stepped into the center of the discussion. His smile was absent and his lips were cruelly curled.

"Listen, you mugs! There'll be no argument about this. Tip can go first; it's his job and his right. You three follow. I go last."

There was objection. Every one feared the man who would be last to go. They would be completely in his power. Even Tip quailed as he thought of his helplessness. But he could propose nothing better. It was, as Con Gallagher said, Tip's duty and his right to take the lead. No one knew what lay ahead in that conduit.

"Shut up!" Gallagher roared, beside himself with fury. "You'll get down that hole if I have to shove you down! I'm going last, get me? *I'm going last!*"

And the argument abruptly ended. Con Gallagher was a bigger man than any of them, and he was terrible in anger. If any one remained after him he would be able to tell no tales.

Tip looked at Gallagher a moment before descending. There were things he would have said could he utter them, but he found it impossible. His eyes spoke for him eloquently. Gallagher smiled.

"Get going, kid!" he said.

Tip Ransom dropped into the opening in the floor.

Carrying the lighted candle, his by virtue of precedence, Tip squeezed into the conduit. His hands and knees shrank from contact with the slime, and his stomach, trembling with nerves, revolted. He forced himself on into the further darkness.

Tip's progress required enormous effort. He could not crawl. He advanced by convulsive jerks which jammed his body forward inch by inch. A space sixteen by sixteen, clogged with ancient slime, affords scarcely enough room in which to lie comfortably. The candle complicated matters, but he dared not extinguish it. Sweating, cursing, nauseated to the core, and racked with fear of the trap this might prove to be, Tip Ransom wormed ahead.

It took fifteen minutes to reach the bend in the sewer. At first glance it looked like a dead end in the uncertain light of the candle. Tip's heart ceased to beat for a second. The sewer was old, abandoned. Perhaps it had been closed off. Retreat was hopeless. No man could work backward, for he would only build up behind him a wall of slime and waste that would block him solidly after

a few feet. Tip worked ahead frantically.

The bend was open. He thrust the candle around the corner, and it flickered in a faint draft. The opening was small. Refuse had gathered, and it was jammed in the bend as though imbedded in concrete.

Tip scattered as much of the barricade as he could. Some of it was immovable. Here the slime had formed a caked deposit that would only surrender to steel. Tip forced himself into the narrow space, and then jerked, writhed and fought its grip on him as he never had fought in a lifetime. He was ten minutes getting through, and then he lay exhausted on the other side. It had seemed an eternity. Presently he roused himself and continued.

Half an hour after his entry in the sewer Tip Ransom emerged from the outlet on the river bank. Heedless of danger, he scrambled through the tangled weeds and threw himself into the slowly swirling waters. He was unspeakably filthy. Kneeling in the stream, he surrendered to nausea. Moving into deeper water, he submerged himself and washed the slime from his body. When he crawled back to shore he felt weak, but within his breast the glow of victory was beginning to warm him.

In a few minutes Macklin crawled from the outlet. He shot a white, hard glance at Tip and made for the river. Tip looked upward at the wall. They were directly beneath the guard's little shed, but Tip felt secure. This danger was as nothing compared to what he had just survived. Macklin came shivering from the river and joined him in the weeds without speaking.

Boone followed. He came forth in a frenzy of terror that even daylight did not immediately dispel. They had to threaten him, to quiet his hysteria. He washed quickly and cowered in the weeds, a terribly shaken man.

Slade came next, smiling in twisted fashion beneath the slime. He was the only one to talk as they waited for Con Gallagher.

Minutes passed and there was no sign of the big man. They continued to wait, and even Slade became silent. They listened at the mouth of the conduit and heard nothing. They crouched again in the weeds and watched the yawning hole. It seemed that hours went by; they stirred as the damp chill of coming fall crept into their bodies.

Tip scarcely dared think. Downriver some distance, obscure in the steady rain, lay the prison dock. Within a light shed floated the swift prison launch. In the wall the grille gate rested solidly. Tip looked at the gate and he looked at the tiny guard house on the wall above.

Slade began to curse, watching the silent, empty sewer outlet. Macklin told him to shut up. Boone trembled and drew closer to the others.

"We can't wait," said Ransom. "We better lam." He did not utter what all were thinking. "Who can swim?"

They all could swim.

"We'll hit for the other shore and scatter. It's all farming country over there. Lay low for a couple of days, get some clothes, and head for the city. They'll be looking for us by dark."

"O. K!" said Macklin. He led the way into the water after removing his shoes and tying them about his neck.

Once as he swam Tip looked back. He still had hope despite the fear in his heart. But the shore was empty, there was no sign of Gallagher. Tip struck out into the current, his eyes on the shore three hundred yards away.

A spasm seized Tip Ransom's stomach and his very blood froze solid as the soft rustle of raindrops on the water was drowned in a sudden torrent of sound. The sound beat on the ears, plucked at raw nerves, drove spikes of terror into the brain. It was the prison siren, the escape alarm.

"He ratted!" Boone shrieked ahead, ceasing to swim. "I knew that's what he wanted. Damn him—I knew he'd rat on us!"

He swallowed a mouthful of water in his hysteria and sobbed hoarsely. He was

utterly unstrung. The others paid no attention but grimly ploughed the harder through the rippling water.

The great grille gate at the dock rumbled up and half a dozen uniformed men ran forth. They paused to look out on the river. Ransom saw them and called to the others to cease all motion. They did not hear him. The guards picked out the fugitives and fired a few shots over their heads to warn them and to announce to the prison that the quarry was in sight. They raced for the launch and leaped grimly into the cockpit.

The events of the next few minutes form a dark chapter in the annals of Graymoor Prison. They were impossible to explain; they simply happened, as curious and horrible things happen without reason when men find themselves flung headlong into any stark drama of life and death. The guards in the launch claimed that the fugitives brandished guns, or what looked like guns. Naturally they looked for guns. Contrary to all nature as it may be, guns do turn up in prisons. The guards had a machine gun mounted on the bow of their craft. Some one turned loose the certain death lying dormant in its barrel, and the water about the swimming convicts boiled and churned in accompaniment to the stunning tattoo from the weapon. The firing only lasted a moment. Its effect was immediate. The convicts were no longer swimming, and the water bubbling about them was stained a livid red.

Tip Ransom treaded water, striving desperately to keep both hands above the surface, fingers extended widely as a sign of surrender. He had not attempted to keep up with the others after the launch darted forth from its lair, and though the stream of lead played close to him he was not harmed. He shouted for mercy as the machine gun swung on him. It ceased firing at that moment, and he was spared. He was the first picked up. He was hauled dripping over the side of the launch, a fist struck the side of his jaw shockingly, and he piled into a corner of the cockpit, unconscious.

THE PUNISHMENT cells at Graymoor are no worse than those of any penitentiary the country over. They express the corrective ideas of two generations back, and express them well. They were in the basement of the main building, a single line of narrow coops walled with stone, windowless except for a small grille in the solid steel door, ventilated by a pipe running from one corner of the low ceiling to the main vents a couple of stories above. There is no cot, there is no light, there is no sound; there are only a couple of moldy blankets, a low stool, and twenty-four hours of reflection on a diet of bread and water. The occupant of a cell remains there at the pleasure of the warden.

Tip Ransom, so far as he knew—and so far as he cared at first—was in solitary for good. He would not talk, and Warden McCloud was raging, to put it mildly. McCloud screamed curses at his men for killing the other convicts, for the superintendent of prisons would want adequate explanation, and that at hand was most inadequate. McCloud tried hour after hour to exact from Ransom an admission that his companions had carried pistols. All he got from him was a snarling refusal to admit anything. The pistols, if any, now rested at the bottom of the river, and the dead men in the prison "ice box" were beyond admitting a single word. Tip Ransom, beaten, bleeding and victorious, was cast into the dungeon to think it over.

Tip did a great deal of thinking in the hours and days that followed the tragic failure. Tip Ransom was close to the end of his tether. He was a lifer, and the warden could not punish him by extending his term with a jail break conviction. Instead, since erring prisoners must be shown the futility of their ways, there would be other punishment. Complete withdrawal of privileges, seclusion from all his fellows, a riding by the keepers that would never cease. Out in the yard there was a small steel and concrete house where the incorrigibles were kept.

They remained there in eternal solitary, taking their exercise when the other inmates of Graymoor were at work. They were lifers all, without a single reason for their existence, hopeless and lost. They were the living dead.

Tip Ransom's reflections led him to a conclusion that puzzled the warden. Tip still refused to talk, but aside from that he became a model of convict deportment. He was meek, he ceased to snarl, he accepted everything that they piled upon him to break his spirit, and he did not complain. Except for that one curious defiance his spirit was broken. McCloud gave up the attempt to make him talk and left him to languish in the dungeon until the breaking was permanent.

McCloud could not read Tip's soul, so he never guessed the simple purpose which sustained Tip through all his ordeal. Life held nothing for Tip now, inside or out. He could view death quite calmly, in fact with anticipation. Before he died he wanted only one thing, and that he wanted very badly indeed. They had not thought to search the sole of Tip's left shoe and he still carried that shining strip of steel with the needle tip. Ransom was willing to endure anything in Graymoor so long as hope remained of being one day restored to privileges and meeting Con Gallagher so that he might slide that four-inch blade between his ribs.

Because of his double sin, jail break and refusal to talk, Tip Ransom remained in solitary longer than any man in Graymoor's history. Through that entire fall he lay in the darkness, and he came forth only when McCloud was reminded by the prison doctor that his death in the dungeon might cause a scandal. Tip was transferred to the small steel and concrete house at one end of the yard. There he was blinded by unaccustomed sunlight, and there he shivered with the cold as he took his daily exercise in the tiny four by six yard behind his cell.

The inmates of the little house welcomed him. He saw them but once every couple of weeks when the cells were changed, but their voices were always near. They had heard of his break, though they lacked details. They were completely out of touch with prison gossip. They listened eagerly to his narrative, and they cursed the guards and the treacherous Gallagher for him. Tip was silent when the keepers were about, and even to the men in the cells he was reserved. Patiently, stolidly, he built up his demolished reputation for amenability. The satisfaction of voicing his feelings was small in comparison to that which was ever before him as a goal. The very intensity of his purpose robbed his punishment of some of its weight. Until that one thing was accomplished life was not entirely without meaning.

Spring was over the land when Tip Ransom emerged from the little house. He listened to the warden's charge without expressing an emotion.

"Ransom, I'm not letting you go through kindness," McCloud told him. "You've been punished for doing wrong, and you're being rewarded for doing right. You have your own reasons for keeping shut about your break last fall and I'm going to respect them. You're the only survivor, the damage has been done, and I'm willing to let bygones be bygones. I needn't remind you that your records stands against you now and that if you add another count to it you'll be crucified here. I'll do it personally and enjoy it. I'm giving you a chance—now make the most of it!"

Tip Ransom thanked him kindly, and respectfully took his departure. It escaped McCloud's attention that the prisoner had promised nothing.

Tip was that day installed again in a cell on his old tier. The men he had known more than half a year ago greeted him with a touch of subdued awe. Tip smiled to himself at their attitude. He knew that he had made history at Graymoor, and that he was elevated in the eyes of his fellows to a place among the *samurai*. He smiled a pale smile in answer to their questions and went about his business alone. They watched

him and pitied him in their hard fashion. They saw them every day in the yard, the men who walked alone—the stir bugs whom Graymoor had broken.

HIS RELEASE brought a reaction upon Tip Ransom. He felt a sudden desire for peace. He had lived for months without a friend, and the sight of his fellows reminded him again of common human emotions, loyalty and understanding and the stabilizing influence of a pal. He permitted himself to remember days which had not been so bad after all, compared to those of the past months. Afternoons when he met Con Gallagher in the yard and walked with him, moments when they bared their souls in the trying times of their plot's inception. And then these thoughts turned upon him and aroused a fury in his mind, a fury unlike anything he had ever before known. It was a red, blinding emotion that he could not cope with, which threatened one day to unseat his reason.

The second day of his new freedom Tip was at large in the yard during recreation for the first time. He walked alone but no one saw him talking to himself. He was watching. He had not seen Gallagher during breakfast or lunch, but he should find him now.

Tip Ransom saw no sign of the big engineer.

Tip asked no questions of his fellows. He could not do that, for it would give his purpose away. He was cunning, preferring to be patient a little longer. Gallagher could not escape him indefinitely.

They put Tip to work in the chair factory on a lathe. During the first morning he found opportunity to chance a brief departure from the machine. The boiler room was below. Only one face was familiar when Tip looked within. A new engineer stood in Con Gallagher's place, a new fireman in Slade's. The other fireman had been Slade's mate.

"Where's Gallagher?" Tip demanded of the older man.

The man turned a scared face on Tip.

"Don't *you* know?"

"Never mind what I know! Where is he now?"

"Why—" The fellow gulped ludicrously, unable to prevent himself. "Great Judas, he went down! Didn't they tell you?"

"They told me nothing. Went down where? What d'you mean?"

"They never found his body. He sank right off. He musta been full of lead. They got the others and dragged the river for days and never found a trace of him."

Tip's soul was curling up in incredulous horror.

"You mean—he was with us? He was shot? He went down out there?"

"Sure! The whole pen knew the story that same day."

Tip looked at the man, his throat paralyzed. Then he turned and ran from the room.

The guard on the middle of the west wall saw him walking in the empty yard. The guard did not recognize him but he picked up his rifle nevertheless and watched. He saw the prisoner walk to the carpenter shop, stop before it, take a weird, uncertain bearing, and begin to pace toward the river wall with mincing steps. The guard shouted to him, but the prisoner paid no attention. He continued till he reached a certain point midway between the shop and the wall. There he stopped and looked at the ground for some time, swaying like one who is drunk. The guard became worried now, and he put in a telephone call to the main guard room. As he hung up the receiver he saw the prisoner drop on his hands and knees.

The P. K. and two of his men came racing out of the main building. They spotted Ransom immediately and made for him. They found him squatting on the ground desperately digging a hole in the packed soil with a sharpened strip of scrap steel. He paid no attention to them beyond crying hoarsely when they tried to interrupt:

"He's in the bend! It got him! I tell you, he's stuck in the bend! He was the biggest of the lot and he couldn't back out. Get away, damn you—"

They had to take the shiny blade away from him by force, and it required the full efforts of the two guards to propel him toward the main building.

The queer affair was discussed at length in the guard room that night.

"I've seen 'em go before," said one, "and there ain't no mistake. He's off his nut and no fooling."

"What the hell happened to him?"

"Hell, I don't know. He's been too quiet all along to be right. He's better off. Life is easier in the fit house for a lifer. And if he comes around and gets all the loose screws tightened up again he's got a swell basis for a plea for a pardon. He ain't so bad off, not with his record."

"The poor damn fool," said the other. "He's the one hit the skids when his broad went back on him, ain't he?"

"Yeah. If he got away clean last fall he'd probably been back by now for murder. He's lucky. He couldn't beat the system, but he sure came second best by going over the Blue Wall!"

"Yeah—" the other grinned—"over the Blue Wall is out!"

MAN EATER

By

E. A. GUEST

THE AMBABHONA man eating tigress, as it was officially known, killed no less than one hundred and sixty-eight persons in four years.

Though called a *man* eater, this tigress ate women also. If given the option it would prefer the woman every time, as being more succulent and juicy than the tough, sinewy man. It is well known that the hunting leopard, which is bred for sport by the ruling princes of India, will, when unhooded and released from his chain and shown the herd of deer, select and run down the fattest buck and, while doing so, pass many smaller deer.

The Bengal government offered a reward of five hundred sovereigns for the destruction of this man eater. The reason for such action was that not only were human lives being sacrificed, but the government revenue from forest produce was considerably reduced, natives deserting tracts of government reserved forest through terror of this beast.

Its habit was to follow woodcutters by the sound of their hatchets, and to prowl about in the vicinity till a man came down from the tree, and then carry him off. Also the village postal runners ran great risks. Many of them were killed by this beast, which was attracted by the jingle of bells which they carried to break the monotony and also to scare away wild animals.

Even a crowd of people was not immune from attack. When extra hungry this beast would charge into the crowd, roaring. And in the confusion which ensued she would carry off one person.

Day or night made no difference. Having discovered by actual experience how easy it was to get human beings, who seemingly have not the instinct of the lower animal to warn them of approaching danger, and having found that man was powerless when seized, this tigress was fearless. It would prowl about near the homesteads of the villagers during the day and carry off people. This resulted in many villages near the forests being deserted.

The superstitious natives called the animal a *Deota*—incarnation of the Deity. They also said that having eaten so many human beings this tigress had got human intelligence. It was, moreover, their firm belief that only a *Deota* could destroy the beast.

On the first occasion that I sat alone on a *machan*—a seatlike structure in a tree—throughout the night over a bullock that had been killed by the tigress on the previous night, to try to shoot the beast by moonlight, the natives begged me not to be so foolish. They declared that, unlike other tigers, this beast could climb trees. When, however, they found me alive the next morning, though the man eater had been to the spot during the night, they declared that I would be the one to shoot the *adam-khor*—man destroyer—as it was called in Hindustani.

There was some justification for the belief of the natives that this beast had acquired human intelligence from the very remarkable fact that it became so artful and cunning that, even when very hungry, it would not return to a human kill, or, for that matter, any other kill.

On carrying off a person, the tigress would have a hurried meal of the most fleshy parts of the body. On being disturbed by the villagers, turning out with firearms and drums and torches to recover the body, it would leave the neighborhood and travel perhaps ten miles and then kill a fresh victim.

Many and varied attempts and devices were tried by the forest and civil and police officers to rid the district of this menace, which grew bolder as the days went by. To sit by moonlight over kills was useless, and it was gruesome to sit over a corpse during the night in the lonesome forest. Some officers sat on trees or in a hole in the ground over live baits. Others sat on a tree with a dummy below in the shape of a woman, and by pulling a string they could jangle the bangles on the dummy's arms. But the tigress was not to be taken in! It was much too wary when there were sportsmen on its track. Two Indian *shikaries*—sportsmen—who were on its track had the tables turned when the beast tracked and killed them. After that no native would try to destroy it.

The nearest it ever came to being shot was in a beat—general drive by beaters through the forest—when she was fired at by an Indian forest officer, who missed.

The destruction of the beast came about this way:

I was on tour in the district during the rainy season and got information that the man eater had carried off a girl of twelve who was weeding in a paddy field with her uncle. This happened in the territory of an adjoining native state. I at once moved my camp and put up at a police station on the border of British territory, about three miles from the spot.

The natives were delighted; they swore by me. They tried out numerous *kills*—baits of live cattle—all over the forests. On the first night the man eater, which was evidently hungry, mauled a large, dangerously horned buffalo, in its hind quarters. Usually the attack by a tiger is made from in front—in throwing its victim the neck is broken. I sat over the buffalo the whole of the following night, but, no doubt acting on the principle that discretion is the better part of valor, the tigress did not return.

On the next day a woodcutter, fortunately for him, saw the man eater near

the village tank before it saw him. He ran into the village and gave information, and large bodies of natives well armed tied out more *kills*.

Good fortune favored me. The tigress killed a bullock and managed to break the rope by which it was tied. It ate part of the carcass and then dragged the rest through the dense undergrowth of forest for several hundred yards, intending no doubt to hide it in some cave in the hills. But as it dragged the carcass along the course of a rivulet its progress was impeded by a large boulder against which the carcass got stuck, and the tigress had to leave it there. That was a most fortunate thing for me, because there would have been great risk in tracking the beast to its den through forest which grows luxuriantly during the rainy season of the year. But the fact that it was the wet weather, when sportsmen do not go out hunting, is the only explanation for the wary man eater's returning to its kill. The season had the effect of putting her off her guard.

The village headman wrote to me to come early to sit over the kill, as the tigress was known to be about all day. I had given orders previously that I would myself make the necessary arrangements for the *machan*. This I did and I took up my position on a tree about forty yards from the kill, in full view of the boulder against which it lay.

At two P.M. I was made aware that the beast was afoot by a series of roars, which to me were sweet music. They began away up on the hillside and then came gradually nearer.

The game was now in my hands and it was only a question of minutes. I was on the tiptoe of expectation. To keep my rifle sights clear I had to keep on wiping off the raindrops of a heavy tropical shower.

In about half an hour, which to me seemed like ages, the huge yellow paws of the monster emerged from the undergrowth. In a flash it stood there on the boulder, looking down at its kill. The great yellow queen of the forests in all its glory!

It was a matter of seconds before my .303 rifle cracked, and a Jeffery's soft nosed split bullet found lodgment in the brain of this destroyer of human life. The monster fell forward over the boulder on which it had stood facing me, and on to the carcass of its last victim, which had been avenged. Its brains trickled in the water, up to the foot of the tree on which I was perched.

The crack of my rifle was echoed by the yell of triumph of the natives, who were waiting about a mile away. They knew my rifle shot signified that I had shot their great enemy. As they gathered around the dead tigress they told how one or another had lost a relation who had fallen victim to it.

Moreover, true to their belief, they brought out the red paint and wanted to do worship to me as a *Deota*. I, however, waved them aside and told them that I was an ordinary mortal like any of them.

The women brought their little children, screaming with terror, and made them touch the beast for luck. Every particle of the flesh was taken to be eaten, and this was the only tiger in all my experience of over twenty years whose flesh the people greedily seized upon.

While they were welcome to the flesh, I did think they overdid matters a bit when they stole all the whiskers which, I was told, they used as charms and also medicinally for such complaints as asthma.

When the government, which had marked the beast for destruction for six years, was satisfied after waiting nine months that human kills by the man eater had ceased, and that I had indeed shot the man eater, they paid me the reward.

By shooting this beast I became the most popular person in the district.

Concluding

A Novel of the Canadian Outlands

By

JAMES B. HENDRYX

THAT DUDE

WHEN young Jerry Temple came into the fur country from the cities, to serve his northland apprenticeship at McCarron's trading post on the far rivers, he found a ruthless enemy in Ezra Quail, a free trader to whom old McCarron had promised his daughter, Marjory, in marriage. Jerry was ordered out of the land by Quail; he replied by thrashing the trader soundly on the beach at Fort Chipewyan.

Jerry took hold of the job at McCarron's like a veteran. But it was not long before the dour old Scotsman realized that the boy and his daughter were seeing too much of each other. He warned Jerry that Marjory was promised to Quail, but Jerry, enraged, replied that the girl would be given the brutal trader only over his dead body.

One day, after the winter trading was over, Quail came to McCarron's post for supplies. Deliberately he tried to rouse Jerry to the point of attacking him—and succeeded. Jerry knocked aside his gun with a hammer, and the trader fell among his own dogs, who hated him for his cruelty. Jerry then rescued the man from the fangs of the sled huskies.

Quail went back to his own post in a rage, determined to kill Jerry at the first opportunity. In his black mood he brutally attacked Jim Mogee, an Indian, nearly killing him. Mogee left, when he

AT McCARRON'S

recovered consciousness; but Quail lost his nerve at the light in the Indian's eye, and started to trail him.

At McCarron's, Marjory and her father prepared to make the annual trip to Fort Chipewyan, leaving Jerry in charge of the post. The boy, when he learned that Marjory was to go alone to Quail's cabin to drop off supplies, took her aside, making her promise to take his shotgun along for protection. Marjory named a spot where she would leave the gun after she swung back to the trail to meet her father.

A short time after McCarron left, two strange Indians came in with an enormous and rich catch of fur. Jerry drove good bargains, and was elated at his luck.

It was with a feeling of relief that he found his gun in the place named by Marjory, for he knew she had not come to harm at Quail's hands. While he was finding some sport at bird shooting, he came face to face with an Indian. The

man regarded him for a moment in somber silence. Then:

"Me, I'm com' to Quail for trade," he said. "Quail dead!"

"DEAD!" cried Jerry. "What do you mean, dead?"

"Som' wan shoot um on de head. She dead on de floor. Me, I'm com' queek lak' hell away, by gar. I'm gon' for Fond du Lac. I'm hear you shoot, I'm com' to see." He paused as his eyes regarded the shotgun in Jerry's hand, then raised with a knowing look to his face. "Mebbe-so yo' keel Quail, eh? Dat damn good t'ing!"

Jerry's mind was racing so that he scarce heard the words.

"Why do you think I killed him?" he asked, hardly knowing that he spoke.

"She's head all bus' to hell. De rifle mak' de roun' hole."

"You better get on to Fond du Lac," answered Jerry gruffly.

And when the Indian had disappeared, he stood for a long time staring into the North where, somewhere beyond that wide expanse of snow covered ice, Ezra Quail lay dead in his trading post. Jerry's brain was in a whirl. That Marjory had shot Quail was entirely conceivable; but that she had shot him and then gone calmly ahead with her program of swinging down to Fire Island and caching the shotgun was not conceivable at all. She would either have rushed frantically by the shortest route possible to overtake her father, or she would have hastened back to the post, to him. He would strike out for Quail's and investigate. Vividly the words of the girl came to him: "Maybe I'll kill him myself, some day. Who knows?"

RAPIDLY he struck out on the back trail of the Indian. At the edge of the willow flats he paused. It would soon be dark. Already the twilight was deepening, and with the sky overcast the night would be black, and he could not hope to follow the trail across that level expanse of ice. The warm wind continued to blow. He could camp comfortably, and strike out at daybreak. Turning into the scrub, he built a fire, gathered a thick bed of spruce boughs, dressed a couple of ptarmigan, roasted and ate them. Despite the comparative mildness of the night Jerry slept fitfully. He had brought no blanket and he awoke from time to time, cramped and cold, to replenish his fire.

Morning found him on the trail. The wind held, and the day was warmer even than the preceding one. The sky had cleared and the snow glare hurt his eyes. It took him nearly four hours to make the ten miles to Quail's post, situated on a bluff, facing the west, on the north reach of the lake. A covey of ptarmigan flushed from before the closed door, and instinctively Jerry fired, bringing one down. He reloaded, retrieved the bird and thrust it into his pocket. Before entering he stood studying the snow, which in the sunny exposure had softened to sloppiness. He could barely make out the tracks the Indian had made only the day before.

Standing his gun against the log wall, he pushed the door open and stood for some moments upon the threshold, blinking into the dark interior. Gradually his eyes readjusted and objects began to take form out of the gloom. There were the pieces containing the sugar and the pork which Marjory had delivered, piled carelessly to one side; and sprawled in the alley that led back to the stove between the goods and the counter lay the frozen corpse.

The man had evidently stood within ten or twelve feet of the doorway when the blast from the shotgun had caught him in the face, tearing away the whole right side of his head. The force of the charge had carried him backward so that he lay, a ghastly object with half a face in which one frozen eye stared glassily. He was shoeless, and a toe of ice protruded grotesquely through a hole in the heavy sock. Tight lipped, Jerry moved closer, his eyes searching the floor. He stooped

to examine the hands. They were empty, nor was there any weapon on the floor beyond the body. Passing to the rear, Jerry examined the man's gun, which stood in a corner beyond the stove. It had been freshly oiled and loaded. He tried to roll the body over in search of a weapon, and shuddered to note that the tangled matt of hair was fixed fast to the floor in a pool of frozen blood.

Stepping to the doorway, he stood striving to visualize the scene that had ended Quail's life. He was probably walking toward her—she had fired; that was all. Over and over the girl's words repeated themselves in his brain: "Maybe I'll kill him myself, some day; who knows?" And the words of the squaw as she had stood stolidly washing the dishes: "Dat damn good t'ing you shoot um dead. Den you git marry." And his own urging of her to carry the gun, and carry it loaded every minute she was at Quail's.

Jerry knew that the girl loved him, and hated Quail. He remembered that she had asked, almost eagerly, whether Quail was dead, the time he knocked him out. Had her hatred of him, and her fear, coupled with her own half formed thought, and the advice of Nehwatna—yes, and his own suggestion of carrying the gun—had all these combined to put her into a frame of mind where she had shot without sufficient provocation? Had the thought come suddenly and overwhelmingly upon her as she stood here in the doorway that this man's life alone stood between her and happiness, love; the happiness and the love that is the right of every woman? And having done that would she have had the consummate nerve to proceed deliberately to the split rock and cache the gun, and then join her father? Vaguely Jerry wondered if she had even stopped to shoot ptarmigan as she had planned. And when she did rejoin her father, would she tell him what had happened, or would she wait for events to take their course?

In any case her plea must be self-defense. And at the thought Jerry's brow contracted into a frown. Even though that plea were honest—and he could well believe that—a strong doubt of its honesty would be raised by the fact that not only was Quail unarmed, but he was hatless, coatless, and in his stocking feet, while she stood in the doorway, dressed for the trail, a harnessed dog team at her heels. Flight was so obviously the easier, the more natural solution. They could not make it murder, of course. But there was manslaughter, and prison bars, and the law was an uncertain thing. Even though it ended in acquittal, there would be long, long months of waiting, in a jail probably, and expense, and the scornful hectoring of the prosecutor.

Jerry came to a decision. He could spare her all that, he would spare her! With an obvious case of self-defense in evidence the investigating officer would make no arrest. Quail's sudden insane rages would furnish the motive for his attack. It would all be very simple—merely to cock Quail's rifle and lay it where it would have dropped from his hand when he fell.

He jumped nervously as he felt a movement against his side. He glanced downward. In his pocket the ptarmigan was straining in vain to beat its wings in the throes of its death agony.

"Poor devil, I thought you were dead," muttered Jerry and, reaching into the pocket he drew out the bird, drenched in blood, snapped its neck and returned it. Stepping over the body, he picked up the rifle, and for several minutes busied himself in placing it convincingly upon the floor. Returning to the doorway, he surveyed the scene with approval.

"Just about where it would have fallen," he murmured.

A sudden thought struck him and again he frowned. The Indian! Suppose the Indian should say there had been no gun on the floor? Suppose he had noted that it stood where Jerry had found it? But, no; it was not likely that the Indian had paused to make any examination. He had been too terrified at what he had

seen lying there on the floor to have taken even a second glance.

Anyway the gun would be there, and the fact that the Indian had not noticed it would cut no figure. Snow would come and cover his tracks. No one would know he had ever been near Quail's. And the next to come along and discover the body would find the gun.

With a last satisfied scrutiny Jerry Temple closed the door, picked up his shotgun and struck out for McCarron's post, thirty miles distant. It turned colder as the day wore on. The wind whipped into the northeast; clouds obscured the low hung sun; and as darkness gathered it began to snow. Jerry made the river as night fell, and two hours later was climbing the bank toward the welcome light of the trading post.

Nehwatna served him in silence as he wolfed down a huge supper. Several times Jerry found her eyes fixed upon him in a steady gaze. The stare got on his nerves. Was there something she knew, or suspected? If so, why didn't she speak instead of standing there staring like a leather image?

Abruptly he spoke.

"Quail's dead," he said.

The squaw accepted the statement with a solemn nod that expressed neither surprise, nor satisfaction, nor any other emotion. She gathered up the dishes and, carrying them to the stove, proceeded to wash them. Jerry waited a few moments and then perturbed, but dead tired, he walked into the trading room and went to bed.

CHAPTER IX

CONSTABLE BROWN

CONSTABLE BROWN of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was seated in the trading room at Fort Chipewyan, idly listening to the endless arguments and reminiscences of the two old factors, Leith and McCarron, when an Indian entered and reported the finding of the body of Quail lying on the floor of his trading post on Black Lake. Constable Brown was a rookie of less than a year's standing on the force, painfully conscious of his uniform, and with a vast admiration for Constable Brown. Gladly he welcomed the chance of stepping into the limelight. He'd show that girl of McCarron's what a really able man could do. It was her fault that he was sitting there listening to the tiresome palaver of the two old Scots for, pleading fatigue, she had left the room long before he was through with his explanation of the fingerprint method of criminal investigation.

Questioning elicited only the meager information that the Indian had pushed open the door of Quail's trading room to find the body of the trader stretched dead on the floor with half the head blown off. He didn't know whether Quail could have shot himself. He didn't stop to see whether or not there was a gun there. It had snowed the day before. There were no tracks. He was hurrying to Fond du Lac when he heard the sound of shooting on Fire Island and, swinging over there, encountered a white man shooting ptarmigan with a shotgun. He told him of his discovery.

"What did he say when you told him Quail was dead?"

"He say, 'W'at you mean, dead?' I'm say, 'Mebbe-so you keel heem;' an' he say, 'W'y you t'ink I'm keel um?' An' I say, 'She head all bus' to hell, an' de rifle mak' de roun' hole.' An' she say, 'Dat better you git to Fond du Lac.'

"Who was this white man?" asked Constable Brown.

"I ain' know dat. I ain' see heem before."

"Didn't he deny killing him?"

"No—me. I ain' seen heem keel Quail."

"I didn't ask you if you saw him kill Quail. I want to know if the white man told you he didn't kill him?"

"He ain' say he keel heem; he ain' say he no keel heem. He say, 'You git to Fond du Lac.'"

"Is he still on Fire Island?"

"How in hell I know 'bout dat? He say

'git to Fond du Lac,' an' I git. I ain't lak I git my head shoot off, too. At Fond du Lac, McTavish say dat dat better you go to Chipewyan, mebbe-so you fin' poliss."

Constable Brown pondered.

"Clearly a case that calls for an investigation," he announced to the two factors. "Have either of you men any idea of who this white man is?"

The two factors eyed each other for a moment in silence.

"Weel," said McCarron, with evident reluctance. "It might ha' been my clark. Though what he'd be doin' doon on Fire Island I do na ken."

"Has he got a shotgun?"

"Aye. A foolish weapon—gude only f'r the killin' o' birds an' rabbits."

"Or men," suggested Constable Brown dryly. "Are there many shotguns in the country?"

"His is the only one. I do na believe Jerry kilt Quail. At least not wi'out gude provocation. Not only I seen the lad let him live when he had both the chance an' the provocation to kill him, but he saved Quail's life when his ane dogs would have ett him; an' got well bit f'r doin' it."

"I didn't ask for your opinion," snapped Brown. "What I want is facts. So this clerk had trouble with Quail, eh?"

McCarron frowned at the bruskness.

"Weel, he knocked a pistol from Quail's hand wi' a hammer, an' then he gi' Quail the best drubbin' wi' his fists I ever seen a mon git."

"How did the trouble start?"

"Wi' Quail's drawin' his pistol."

"Why did he draw his pistol?"

"If I answered that 'twould be an opinion," answered McCarron sourly. "An' ye say ye do na want opinions."

Constable Brown flushed red under the rebuke. He tried again.

"Were these two men enemies?"

"If I told ye, 'twould be an opinion," answered the old Scot stubbornly.

"How in hell do you expect me to get to the bottom of this if you refuse to answer my questions?" cried the exasperated officer.

"I do na expect ye to," answered McCarron evenly. "If ye ask questions that can only be answered by an opinion, an' ye do na want opinions—why, theer's an' end on't."

"Oh, all right; all right! Give me your opinions, and I'll try to sift the facts out of them. Go ahead; what was the cause of the trouble between these two?"

"Weel, 'tis my opinion," answered McCarron, rolling the word upon his tongue with evident relish, "only my opinion, mind ye, that Quail was jealous o' Jerry Temple."

"Jealous?"

"Aye—jealous. Ye see, my daughter Marjory, the lass 'twas in here awhile back, is promised to Quail—"

"And Quail thought this Jerry Temple was trying to cut him out, eh?" interrupted the constable. "Temple, I suppose, is in love with the girl?"

"Aye."

"What does the girl think about it?"

"'Tis my opinion that she favors Jerry, but would ha' marrit Quail because I had gi' my word to Quail that she would."

"Where is your post?"

"On Black River."

"And this Fire Island—is it near the post?"

"Twenty-five miles this side."

"Where is Quail's from Fire Island?"

"A matter o' ten miles or so north o' there."

"What was Temple doing on Fire Island?"

"The Injun said he was huntin' ptarmigan."

"Is he accustomed to hunt there?"

"No."

"Aren't there any ptarmigan near your post?"

"Aye. But I do na believe the lad murdered Quail."

"Probably not," sneered Brown. "Not the least chance in the world, is there? Here Quail's found with half his head blown off and Temple is seen in the vicinity carrying the only shotgun in the country. Of course," he continued with clumsy sarcasm, "Temple wouldn't have

any motive for killing him, seeing that he was only going to marry the girl Temple loved."

"I do na believe he murdered him," stubbornly insisted McCarron.

LEITH, who had been combing at his huge grizzled beard with his fingers, rumbled corroboration:

"Nor me neither. Though I mistrusted theer'd be trouble. Quail threatened the lad several times whilst they was here, an' the lad told him that killin' was a game two could play. I mak' na doot an' he did kill him, ye'll find a gun i' Quail's hand, or the like. Ony mon has the right to kill in self-defense."

"If it's self-defense, all right," said Brown. "I'll know when I get to Quail's. In the meantime we'll just swing over to your post, McCarron, and pick Temple up and take him along to Quail's."

"'Twould save time to swing up to Quail's an' do the investigatin' first," suggested the old factor.

Constable Brown laughed shortly.

"And give the girl a chance to slip ahead and tell him what we're up to, eh? Or either one of you that seem to think so damned much of him could send an Indian to warn him. I'm not taking any chances. I never give a crook a break. We'll hit straight for your post as fast as we can get there. And when we do get there I'll see to it that neither you nor the girl gets in a private word with him. It's lucky I happened to be here. The chances are this thing would have been hushed up, and nobody any the wiser."

"Ye're an ass, lad," said McCarron pityingly.

"Aye," agreed Leith. "'Tis a matter f'r a wise head, an' yer brains is as onused as yer clothes. They should keep the likes o' ye above, an' send gude men to the rivers."

"I'll show you how much of an ass I am, and what kind of brains I've got!" replied the constable hotly. "The trouble with you fellows is you've run this country so damned long you hate to see any one come in that's got brains enough to see through you. But let me tell you this; as long as I'm on the rivers things are going to be different."

Leith nodded.

"I've been forty year on the rivers, mesel'," he said, "an' I'll say this f'r ye, lad: ye're different from ony policeman I've yet seen."

In his chair McCarron heaved a sigh.

"I wisht Old Man Downey was here."

"You mean Corporal Downey?" asked Brown, a sneer in his voice. "So you're like all the rest of 'em eh? Ever since I've been in the service it's been Corporal Downey this, and Old Man Downey that! Who in hell is this Downey, anyhow? What did he ever do? If he's so damned smart what's he a corporal for, instead of an inspector? Let me tell you something; the day of the old fogy has passed—in policing and everything else. It's the young men that do things! If I was the commissioner, I'd weed all the old men off the force. I'd like to get a chance to show this Corporal Downey up sometime!"

McCarron shook his head sadly.

"If the gude Lard is minded to do me one more favor befoor I dee, I'd ask him to let me be theer at the showin'," he said. "I'll be turnin' in the noo. Ye'll be wantin' an early start i' the marnin'."

CHAPTER X

CONSTABLE BROWN BUILDS HIS CASE

ON A BLUSTERY day, three weeks after Jerry's return from Quail's, McCarron and Marjory arrived at the post accompanied by Constable Brown. The journey from Chipewyan had been anything but a pleasant one, with McCarron silent and dour, and Marjory not on speaking terms with Constable Brown. Any one who would believe for a minute that Jerry Temple had been guilty of a murder was beneath her contempt, and she made no effort to hide her feelings toward the officer who was going to the post for the purpose of

arresting him. It made no difference whatever that, as McCarron explained to her, Jerry would be turned loose at Quail's.

"He'll na be takin' him ootside, lass. The lad will tell his story, an' the facts will prove it; an' theers an end on 't. If he kilt him 'twill be easy to see it was self-defense; an' if he didn't kill him, 'twill tak' a smarter mon than you to prove he did. I'll go along to Quail's to see that the lad gits fair play. In the meantime 'tis better ye don't have aught to say to Jerry. The constable has ordered it so, an' 'twould but serve to harm Jerry's case wi'oot helpin' it an ye went contrary to him. He's a mon o' big words, an' sma' brains. He'll na be long i' the police."

At sight of the uniform as the three entered the trading room Jerry's heart seemed to stand still. Marjory was under arrest! He wondered what she had told them. He found himself wondering whether a judge and a jury would believe that she could have been so excited, so terrorized, that she had not noticed that Quail had a rifle in his hands. Had she said he was unarmed? Well, the rifle was there; it would speak for itself.

For a single moment the girl's eyes met his, and then she was gone. He heard the door close after her as she passed into the living quarters. He wondered at the look in those eyes. Was it horror? Fear? He had never seen exactly that look in any eyes. Then the policeman was speaking, and Jerry found his brain groping to catch the import of the words—

"Jerry Temple, you are under arrest for the murder of Ezra Quail, and it is my duty to warn you that anything you say may be used against you."

He knew that his own face was bloodless as he stared into the face of the officer. He, Jerry Temple, was under arrest for the murder of Ezra Quail! Then Marjory had not told them, had not admitted the shooting. She had not shot, then, in self-defense, but deliberately; the desperate attempt of an overwrought mind to remove the demon who would make of her life an unspeakable hell. She had struck for her right to happiness, to love—to him. So be it. He would never deny the killing.

Once again his thoughts turned to the rifle lying there on the floor of Quail's trading room. A slow grin twisted the corners of his lips. The mute testimony of that rifle would be turned to his own account instead of that of the girl, that was all. His mind groped with the ethics—he was not guilty. He would neither deny nor admit the killing—

The voice of the constable rasped upon his reflections.

"You'll grin out of the other side of your mouth when they slip the rope on you. I suppose you claim it was self-defense."

"What?"

"What! Why, the killing of Quail, of course. I suppose you didn't even know Quail was dead."

"Yes. An Indian told me."

"He didn't tell you any news, either. Where were you when he told you?"

"On Fire Island."

"What were you doing on Fire Island?"

"Hunting ptarmigan."

"No ptarmigan around here, I suppose, that you could have hunted?"

"Lots of 'em."

"What were you doing way over there, then?"

"Hunting ptarmigan."

"You refuse to state whether you killed Quail in self-defense, or not?"

"I do."

"Where's your shotgun?"

Reaching behind the counter, Jerry handed over the gun from which the officer removed the shells which he slipped into his pocket.

"Keep it loaded, eh?"

"Always. Safest way. If you know a gun is loaded you're never going to make the fool mistake of thinking it's empty."

McCarron stood in the middle of the room, a look of bewilderment on his face as his eyes swept the depleted stock of trade goods.

"Losh, lad!" he exclaimed. "We ha' scarce enough stock left to last till the boat comes! What ha' ye done wi' it?"

Constable Brown was forgotten as Jerry smiled into the anxious face of the factor.

"I traded the stuff. Made a good trade, too. The fur's in the loft."

"Traded it! Ha' ye gone daft? Theer's na enough fur left i' the country after the winter tradin' to pay f'r the quarter o' what ye've put out!"

"Oh, yes, there was. Almost as much as you took to Chipewyan—and bought way below what we paid in the winter. Come on up and we'll look it over."

"Stay where you are," ordered Constable Brown. "You can't put anything over on me. It don't take two of you to look at a bunch of fur. Just don't forget you're under arrest for murder, Temple. One crooked move and out goes your light."

JERRY shrugged, and McCarron ascended alone. At the head of the ladder he paused astounded as his eyes swept the piles of sorted fur that littered the floor of the loft. He realized at a glance that here was more than enough to pay for all the goods that had gone out; but where did it come from? McCarron knew, almost to a pelt, what the country ought to yield his post in trade. That this yield should be suddenly doubled was unthinkable—yet here was the fur.

His roving glance came to rest upon a pile of foxskins and, reaching down, he lifted one from the top and subjected it to a minute scrutiny. It was a beautiful pelt, a genuine silver gray of a wonderful brilliance and luster. Then, suddenly, the rugged form stiffened, the stern lips compressed into a hard thin line as the keen eyes remained riveted upon a peculiarly slit ear. For a long time he stood motionless, and then, returning the pelt to the pile, he turned and slowly descended the ladder.

In the trading room Jerry's eyes sought the face of his factor as he waited for the words of approbation he felt sure would fall from the stern lips. Instead, McCarron's eyes seemed to be boring him through.

"Wheer'd ye get yon fur?" he asked in a voice that sounded hard and cold.

"From a couple of Indians."

"What Injuns?"

"Why, I don't know what Indians. I never saw 'em before. They didn't ask for debt, so I didn't ask 'em their names."

"Ye di'na ask 'em!" The voice was still hard and cold but it held now a touch of scorn that was not lost upon the younger man. "Ye say a couple o' Injuns fetches in almost as much fur as I tak' in all winter, an' ye di'na ask 'em who they was. Did they tell ye wheer they got it?"

Surprise at the man's attitude gave way to swift anger at the words. Here Jerry had concluded an enormously profitable deal for which McCarron would get the credit with the company, and all he got out of it was a lot of scornful questioning. Even though McCarron believed he had murdered Quail, at least he might give him credit for the fur deal. Let him think what he damned pleased! To hell with him! Aloud, he said:

"No, McCarron, they didn't tell me. I supposed what this post wanted was fur upon which it could show a profit; not the pedigrees of the Indians that brought it and an itemized record of their hunt."

Marjory did not appear at supper and the meal was concluded in a stony silence, broken only by the occasional rattle of porcelain and the soft padding of the moccasined feet of the squaw.

That night Jerry slept manacled, with Constable Brown's bed placed crosswise at the foot of his own. His resentment against McCarron extended to the girl when she failed to appear at breakfast. She might, at least, by so much as a word or a look let him know she understood. The resentment vanished as he thought of the emotions that must be surging within her breast; remorse, maybe, terror of the law; fear that he might be held for the murder of Quail. He shuddered as he remembered the metallic click with which the handcuffs had fastened upon his

wrists; at least she would be spared that. To save her he might admit the killing of Quail; he would never deny it.

Long before dawn paled the east they were on the river, headed for Quail's. Jerry's bed had been rolled and loaded beside Constable Brown's on the sled the officer had picked up at Fond du Lac.

The going was good on the wind packed snow, and the outfit pulled up at Quail's about noon. One glance at the frozen body sprawled on the floor and Constable Brown turned to Jerry.

"Shotgun, all right," he announced. "No rifle could have done that."

"Aye," agreed McCarron, who stood by grimly. He pointed a lean finger at the object that lay beyond the body on the floor. "Yon's Quail's own rifle that lays where it fell when he dropped it."

Stepping across the body, Constable Brown carefully noted the position of the gun. He glanced about him, his eyes taking in this and that detail of the room. He picked up Quail's book from the counter and glanced through it. At the last entry he looked up.

"Ever have any trouble with Quail?" he asked sharply.

"I've knocked him down a couple of times," Jerry answered. "McCarron was there the last time."

"Did you ever threaten to kill him?"

"Well, after he'd threatened me several times at Fort Chipewyan I told him that killing was a game two could play."

"Did you ever threaten to come up here and get him?"

"No."

"You remember I told you any thing you say may be used against you. It's your right to refuse to answer. Did you know that Quail was to marry Miss McCarron?"

"I knew that McCarron had promised Quail she would."

"Do you know her feeling toward Quail?"

"I know she feared him and hated him."

"Are you in love with Miss McCarron?"

"Yes, I'm in love with her!" Jerry exploded. "And I'm going to marry her, too! Now, use that against me if you can—and be damned to you!"

"But with Quail alive you could never have married her?"

"Sure, I'd have married her."

"Quail's death, though, removed the only obstacle to your marriage?"

"Maybe."

Constable Brown's gaze strayed again to the rifle lying cocked upon the floor.

"Look here, Temple," he said, impatiently. "If you shot Quail in self-defense, why in the devil don't you come out and say so?"

"And if I don't, I suppose you'll use that against me, too?"

"It will go against you—yes."

"All right, then, let it."

The officer lifted the rifle from the floor and stepped to the doorway, where he turned and faced the scene of the killing.

"You probably shot from here," he said. "Maybe I can find the empty shell."

As he let down the hammer of the rifle the rays of the low hung sun struck for a moment aslant the barrel. For long moments the constable stared at the barrel, moving it this way and that to catch the sunlight.

"A-ha," he breathed in such evident delight that both Jerry and McCarron gazed at him in wonder. Leaning the rifle against the door jamb, he slipped the handcuffs from his pockets and snapped them upon Jerry's wrists. "So that's your game, is it?" he breathed. "Well, in a few minutes we'll know who killed Quail."

The voice held such a ring of confidence that Jerry paled perceptibly at the words. Had the constable discovered something that would link Marjory with the shooting? Well, if worse came to worst he could confess that he shot Quail. They should never convict her. It was for love of him that she had done it. He had put the temptation in her way by urging her to carry the gun. He would see her through. At the very next words of the officer the pallor heightened.

"Whoever it was killed Quail, was fool enough to leave his fingerprints on the rifle when he laid it there to look like Quail dropped it when he fell. And the fingerprints are in blood. Think of the luck of that! Just about the best medium in the world for recording fingerprints! Blood all over the place, and he got his hands in it, and then he fussed with Quail's rifle."

AS HE TALKED, the man was removing certain articles from his bag, and Jerry's heart sank to utter hopelessness as the gravity of his plight surged home upon him. He remembered that he had pulled the bloody ptarmigan from his pocket to kill it, and doubtless his hands were covered with blood as he arranged the rifle. Then if Brown succeeded in finding the empty shell with which he had brought down the bird — good night.

Ordering McCarron to build a fire in the stove and put on some water to warm, the constable busied himself with some fine powder which he dusted carefully upon the rifle barrel, which he carried out into the sunlight and proceeded to photograph from a dozen angles. When the water was ready he developed his films and printed the proofs. These he compared with the prints of Jerry's fingers. The two sets were unmistakably identical, and the three stood staring at them in silence—the constable in ill concealed delight; McCarron in stern solemnity; and Jerry in a dull apathy. This was the end. The trial would be a mere matter of form. He hadn't a chance in the world. His only possible explanation —the truth, if believed—would convict Marjory. Well, he would at least be game. The grim humor of the situation flashed upon him, and he grinned into the astounded face of Constable Brown.

"I suppose you'll use those against me, too," he said.

"Well, I'll be damned," uttered Constable Brown, as he proceeded to stow his precious photographs together with the rifle which he wrapped in many layers of protecting paper.

From that moment evidence piled up fast against Jerry Temple. With a broom, Brown proceeded to sweep aside the snow from a space before the door in his search for the empty shell. An exclamation of satisfaction escaped him as the fine powdery snow was swept away exposing the old snow—ice, now—that had been softened to slush upon the day Jerry had visited Quail's. Triumphantly the officer pointed to tracks in the snow—tracks that showed clean cut as though stamped in putty—tracks into which Jerry's pacs fitted perfectly.

But it was over an oval mark close to the wall that Constable Brown gloated inordinately—the pattern of the butt plate of a gun that had been leaned against the building. And it was a pattern into which the butt plate of Jerry's shotgun fitted to a nicety, even to the mark that showed where the butt plate had been chipped at one end. Again the camera was brought into use and Brown cautioned McCarron to impress the details of all he had seen upon his memory.

"You'll be called in as a Crown witness," he told the factor. "I've got an open and shut case without you, but I'm not taking any chances. The trial will probably be at the fall assizes; you'll be notified. Just don't forget anything you've seen, and don't let the defense attorneys get you flustered."

Further sweeping brought to light the empty shell which Jerry had tossed aside after shooting the ptarmigan, and with the shell in his hand, the constable compared it with the two he had slipped from Jerry's gun.

His case complete, the officer turned sneeringly upon his prisoner.

"I suppose you thought no one would ever find out that you had been up here the day Quail was killed, yet to a trained mind your movements are as plain as though you had published them in a newspaper. The squaw told me you stayed away one night from the post. But what really tightened the rope around your

neck was your attempt to manufacture evidence. You figured on playing safe with a self-defense plea in case any one found out you had been here. I'm not saying it might not have worked if any one but me had happened on to the case. I don't know another man on the force except the C. I. B. fellows in Ottawa, that know anything about fingerprints, to say nothing of carrying an outfit with them. You did a lot of fool things, Temple. For instance, using a shotgun in a country where there are no other shotguns. And leaving your empty shell where it could be found and compared with those you use. And in failing to obliterate your tracks. And in picking up that gun when your hands were all bloody. But the worst blunder of the whole thing was in letting that Indian that saw you on Fire Island go on to Fond du Lac and Chipewyan. If Quail hadn't been found till the snow had melted, or if any one else had found that rifle, you might have got away with it. But the jig's up. It's an iron-clad, open and shut case. You haven't got a chance in the world to beat it. You might as well come clean."

Jerry Temple summoned a smile.

"Your lecture has almost convinced me that crime doesn't pay," he said. "It's surely hard luck that I ran foul of so able a member of the force."

McCarron interrupted with a frown.

"Na, na, lad. 'Tis a grand nerve ye have. But, f'r a' that 'tis unseemly to be jokin' wi' one foot i' the grave. I can na doot the noo that ye kilt Quail. An' I would na be condemnin' ye had ye not robbed him after ye kilt him. But, lad, what ha' ye done wi' the stuff ye claim ye traded f'r the fur? I'll be helt accountable, an' 'twill cost me a pretty penny to mak' it gude."

"I traded it for the fur, just as I told you!" exclaimed Jerry. "What do you mean—robbed Quail? And what do you mean about making it good? You have the fur, haven't you—more than enough to pay for the goods."

For answer the old Scot motioned the two to follow and led the way to Quail's fur loft which, unlike that at McCarron's was merely a room connected with the trading room. The old Scot threw open the door. The fur loft was empty!

"I kenned it was Quail's fur ye had when I seen that split eared silver gray. 'Tis a pelt 'twas offered to me, an' when I would na pay the price asked, the Injun took it on to Quail's."

Jerry Temple stood speechless at the words. Was it possible that the Indians had murdered Quail? But, no, Quail had been killed with a shotgun. The Indians had happened along and, finding Quail dead, had stolen the fur. He was a fool not to have guessed that there was something off color with the deal when McCarron had told him that there would be little or no trading. Constable Brown interrupted the thoughts.

"Probably hired some Injuns to haul the stuff away an' cache it," he opined. "Figured on starting a post of his own, most likely. Well, it will rot where it lays for all the good it'll do him. And, by the way, McCarron, bring that pelt along with you when you come up to testify at the trial. It will establish the fact that Temple had Quail's stuff in his possession."

"Can ye na see, lad, that 'tis me, an' not Quail ye're robbin'? F'r the public administrator will be doon on me f'r the fur, an' the company will demand the value o' the tradin' stock."

"The administrator can't prove it's Quail's fur," reminded Jerry.

"Losh, lad, an' suppose he can't! I ken it's his, an' so do ye; an' I'd na keep a hair of it, though the loss hits me hard."

"You're an honest man, McCarron," said Jerry, looking the factor square in the eye. "I only wish you could believe that I, too, am honest. As a matter of fact, I have told you the exact truth. I traded for that fur with the Indians—and until a moment ago I had no suspicion in the world that it was Quail's fur."

"Tell that to the marines," sneered Constable Brown.

"Ye have told it to me, lad," said McCarron, ignoring the officer. "An' I

believe ye—f'r in ye're eyes I read truth. I ken that 'twas f'r nae robbery ye kilt Quail. An' I ken the noo that the Injuns come along an' stole the fur after he was dead, an' findin' nae one but a green hand at the post they traded it to ye."

"Might have, at that," admitted Constable Brown. "As long as I've got the murder fastened on to him I'll let the robbery slide. We're through here, I guess. We'll be pulling out. Goodby, McCarron. See you at the trial in the fall. And, by the way, when the ground thaws out, you might swing up this way and bury Quail."

"Aye," answered the old factor and, reaching out, he seized one of Jerry's hands in a strong grip. "Gudeby, lad. We'll be thinkin' o' ye back here. An ye'd ha' let the dogs eat him things wouldna ha turned oot as they did."

CHAPTER XI

CORPORAL DOWNEY TAKES A HAND

SPRING came to the North country. Aspen and willow buds swelled and shot forth tiny green leaves; the rivers ran free of ice; and in the lakes myriads of waterfowl sported and fed along the edges of the sullen black ice pans.

Corporal Downey, veteran officer of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, drew his canoe from the water and ascended the bank to McCarron's post on Black River. The old Scot greeted him heartily, for they were friends of long standing.

"Weel, weel, Downey, 'tis gude to see ye the noo. 'Twas Father Giroux told me at Chipewyan that ye was stationed east somewheres."

"Yes, here an' there, where they need me. It's good to get back to the rivers."

"I suppose ye come to Chipewyan on the *Grahame*. I di'na think she'd be doon so soon."

"She was still at McMurray when I come by. She'll be makin' her trip about now. I didn't stop at Chipewyan—followed the south shore. An' by the way, here's a paper they give me to serve on you at McMurray when they found out I was headin' this way. It's a subpena forwarded to 'em from Edmonton an' it demands your appearance in court September twenty-first as a witness in the case of the Crown *versus* Temple." He handed the paper to McCarron, who read it slowly, folded it and placed it in his pocket.

"Wheer'll ye be headin'?" he asked.

"Over east. There's a hooch runner been operatin' for a couple of years over around Wallaston Lake. Several men have tried to get him but his moccasin telegraph is too good, so I figured I'd slip around and try to get him from this side."

The two had seated themselves upon a rude bench, and the sound of their voices brought Marjory to the doorway.

"My goodness, how you've grow'd!" exclaimed the old officer, taking a brown hand in his own and gazing in frank admiration into the girl's face. "An' got prettier every minute since I seen you last—an' it's been a good while, too. It's a good thing it was me come along instead of some good lookin' rookie, or he'd of camped right here till you said yes—an' then showed up with the wrong prisoner."

The girl blushed and smiled—a smile, thought Downey, of infinite sadness. He suddenly remembered a report he had heard a year back, and frowned.

"They tell me you're goin' to marry Quail."

"Quail's dead," said McCarron. "Murdered in his tradin' room by my ane clark."

"*No!*"

The word rang like a shot, and Downey looked into the violet eyes that flashed defiantly above the flushed cheeks of the girl.

"Losh, lass," said McCarron with a trace of impatience. "As I've told ye time an' again, 'tis as plain a case as ever could be. Wi' my ane eyes I saw the evidence, an' it could na be otherwise."

"Jerry Temple is no murderer," repeated the girl, stubbornly, wearily, as

though the matter had been gone over many a time before. "He may have killed Quail—but he never murdered him."

"Then why did he try to manufacture evidence to mak' it look like self-defense? An' why has he never admitted even bein' at Quail's?"

"I don't believe he tried to manufacture evidence! I know he didn't! I don't care whether they've got a thousand finger-prints—or a million!"

The old Scot sighed in resignation and answered nothing.

"What's it all about?" asked Corporal Downey. "I ain't been on the rivers. I didn't know Quail was dead."

Filling his pipe, McCarron launched into the story as the girl disappeared abruptly into the trading room. He began with what Leith had told him of Jerry's arrival at Chipewyan, and finished with the lad's departure under arrest, from Quail's, with Constable Brown. From time to time Downey interrupted with a question.

Later, when McCarron was busy superintending the overhauling of the engine of the launch, Corporal Downey sought out the girl, who soon found herself pouring her whole story into the sympathetic ears of the old officer, who sat there regarding her through eyes of quiet understanding.

She told him everything—of her hatred and fear of Quail; of her intended marriage with him because her father had ordered it; of all that happened upon the occasion of Quail's visit to the post; of her love for Jerry, and of his avowal of love for her; of his impulsive threat to kill Quail rather than see her married to him; of her own admission that maybe sometime she herself would kill Quail; of her trip to Quail's with Jerry's shotgun—everything.

For a long, long time after she had finished Corporal Downey sat in deep thought. His pipe went out and he refilled it. When he spoke, it was more to himself than to Marjory, and her face went white at the words.

"He ain't got a chance—on the evidence."

"Oh, but, Corporal Downey, if you knew Jerry Temple you would *know* he never murdered Ezra Quail!"

The old corporal nodded thoughtfully.

"I do know him, Marjory. I never heard of him before. But in the last hour you've made me know him. I've somehow got a hunch that maybe you're right about him not murderin' Quail. My hooch runner can wait. I guess I'll slip over to Quail's an' have a look-see. His case is comin' up in the fall. An' it would be too bad to have a mistake made."

"Oh, will you?" cried the girl, her eyes alight. "Everything will be all right, now! Jerry never murdered Quail! But that horrible Constable Brown will try to make them think he did!"

"Most likely," commented Downey dryly. "An' maybe he'll succeed. Don't you go raisin' your hopes too high. The cards is against us, heavy. But there's one or two little things that maybe's been overlooked."

"Constable Brown told my father he had what he called an open and shut case."

"Yump," grunted Downey. "That's always the kind of cases rookies has. Well, it's open now; but maybe I can kind of shove my foot in the door before he gets it shut."

IN QUAIL'S trading room next day Corporal Downey spent two hours with his knife digging hand hammered slugs from the log wall. He uncovered Quail's body from the shallow grave where McCarron had buried it and removed two more slugs from his head. With a small saw he removed a section of the skull in which a slug was partially embedded.

He reburied the body, and that evening he sat in Quail's trading room and gazed in satisfaction at the nine misshapen slugs.

"It's jest like I figured it might be," he

muttered aloud. "Every one had shotgun on the brain—first Temple, because he knew the girl had been up there with a shotgun; then Brown an' McCarron, because the Injun told 'em Quail's head had been blow'd off with a shotgun, an' Temple had his shotgun along, an' it was the only shotgun in the country. An' him an' Quail had had trouble. Every damn one of 'em would have know'd if they'd stopped to think that the country's full of old company smooth bores. From what I heard of this young Temple I know'd he never manufactured evidence to cover his own shootin' of Quail. But Brown proved with his fingerprints that he did manufacture evidence; therefore he never shot Quail, but he prob'ly believes yet that the girl shot him. It's plain enough. All I got to do now is hunt up them Injuns that traded in Quail's fur. An' I got a hunch old Nehwatna's goin' to help me out there. She told McCarron she didn't know who they was—but she'll tell me different. It's a long time ago when the smallpox hit LaBiche—but an Injun never forgets."

Back at McCarron's the next evening Corporal Downey grinned into the face of the old Scot, who looked up with puzzled brow from a scrutiny of the misshapen slugs and the gruesome object that was a piece of Quail's skull that the corporal had laid on the counter.

"Queer kind of ammunition your clerk used in his shotgun, wasn't it?"

"Losh, mon, yon's na what he shoots i' his shotgun! 'Tis fine shot he uses. Theer's a few boxes left here. Ye can see f'r ye'rsel'."

"Yump," agreed Downey. "That's what I figured. But there lays the slugs that killed Quail."

"Mon, ye're daft! Di'na I see wi' my ane eyes the lad's tracks befoor Quail's door? An' the place wheer he'd stud his gun agin the wall? An' his fingerprints, plain as a printed page, wheer he'd handled Quail's rifle?"

"Yump. But they can't hang a man fer makin' tracks in the snow, nor neither for standin' a gun agin a wall. An' it ain't a crime that I know of to handle another man's gun as long as you don't carry it off with you."

"But what was he doin' theer if he di'na kill Quail?"

Downey grinned.

"Well, you was there, wasn't you—an' me? An' we didn't kill him."

"Ye talk like a ninny! Quail was dead when I was theer—an' ye, too."

"Not a damn bit deader than he was when Jerry Temple was there, Mac."

There was a rush from the direction of the doorway, a brown hand was laid upon the old corporal's sleeve, and violet eyes that glowed like twin stars were raised to his.

"Oh, Corporal Downey, can you prove it?"

Downey smiled into the eyes.

"Why, I expect maybe I can, when the time comes. I've got quite a chore ahead of me yet, though. You better go down to Edmonton with Mac in the fall. If I have good luck I'll be needin' you there."

"Is it important?" asked McCarron quickly. " 'Twill be quite bit an expense ye'll mind."

"Important as hell," answered Downey, solemnly. "In fact, if she ain't there it'll bust up my whole plan."

"She'll be theer, an' theer's an end on't. But, I misdoot ye'll be able to save the lad, Downey. Yon Constable Brown's a blab an' a coxcomb, but he's smart. 'Twas mesel' said down to Leith's the day the Injun brought word o' the killin', that 'twas a job f'r an aulder head, an' I wisht ye was theer. An' he claimed how if he was commissioner he'd weed all the aulder men out o' the force. He was wishin' f'r his chance to show ye up, an' f'r friendship's sake I'd hate him to do it."

"Me, too." The grizzled old officer grinned. "Maybe I'd better resign before they make him commissioner. But I got to be movin' on. Leave word at the company office where I can find you in Edmonton. Guess I'll slip out in the kitchen an' say goodby to Nehwatna. Good Injun, Nehwatna. Used to know

her way back when she lived on LaBiche."

As the old corporal turned to go two arms raised and two brown hands came together about his neck, and two red lips planted a kiss squarely upon his cheek.

He grinned into the brimming eyes of the girl.

"I wish my wife could have been here," he said. "She won't do that unless I've shaved."

CHAPTER XII

IN EDMONTON

DESPITE the anguished entreaty of his mother and father, and the advice of the legal talent that had foregathered in his defense from Ottawa and Montreal, Jerry Temple steadfastly refused either to admit, or deny, the killing of Ezra Quail. All through the spring and summer he had remained in jail, and now upon the eve of his trial, some of the best legal minds in Canada were gathered in Jeremiah Temple's suite in the palatial new hotel for a last forlorn conference. With pulpit and press thundering with characteristic savagery for his execution on the grounds that he was a rich man's son, the best the defense lawyers dared hoped for was life imprisonment—and were none too sanguine in their hope. The Crown prosecutor boasted a perfect case. He would hold out uncompromisingly for the rope.

In a cheap rooming house on the other side of town, a girl with brown hands and violet eyes, who had never heard of Jeremiah Temple, Sr, save what she had read during the past few days in the newspapers, turned for the hundredth time from the window that gave on to a street of small homes. Nervously she passed a tightly crumpled handkerchief from her left hand to her right, and back again to the left. There was hopelessness in the violet eyes, and the pathos of utter hopelessness in the voice with which she addressed the stern lipped man who, in his suit of funereal black, sat in a straight backed chair, a newspaper spread open upon his knees.

"Oh, father—he will not come. He would surely have been here before this!"

The stern lipped man carefully marked his place with a gnarled forefinger and looked up.

"Aye, lass. But I'm dootin' he'd done ony gude, an he'd been here. It says here they got an ironclad case an' they're clamorin' f'r the lad to be hanged. What wi' theer harpin' on his bein' a rich mon's son, I'm dootin' they can git a fair jury."

"I hate the newspapers!" cried the girl. "They're cruel and savage and full of lies. They picture Jerry as sullen and hard and defiant—like a caged beast in his cell!"

With a dry sob she turned again to the window and the next instant the room rang with a shrill glad cry. McCarron leaped to his feet to see the girl vanish through the doorway, and a moment later found himself staring into the little hallway where Corporal Downey stood smiling into the violet eyes of the girl who was clutching his coat sleeve with all the stength of her two hands.

"Oh, can you save him, Corporal Downey? Can you save him?"

"Sure as shootin'. There ain't nothin' to git excited about. I had him saved up yonder when I showed McCarron them slugs. I kind of wanted to finish up the job, though, an' fetch in the one that done it. An' besides I had that hooch runner to fetch in. Git on your hats an' we'll go over to headquarters an' have Sam Crane turn this here Jerry loose."

McCarron was staring as though Downey had taken leave of his senses.

"Do ye be pratin' o' turnin' the lad loose, mon, when the best lawyers i' a' Canada is workin' night an' day to git him off wi' life imprisonment instead o' hangin'! Do ye na ken they're sayin' 'twill be the biggest murder trial western Canada ever seen?"

Corporal Downey's grin widened.

"Shucks, there ain't goin' to be no trial—not fer Jerry Temple," he drawled. "An' as fer the lawyers, he can fire 'em all. I bet he's had imprisonment enough

already, without hirin' a lot of lawyers to git him in fer life."

A few moments later McCarron caught the girl's eye as the two followed the unkempt figure of the old corporal up the street. He shook his head somberly, and with a swift, significant motion he touched his forehead—and the light that had beamed in the violet eyes gave place once more to hopelessness. Hadn't the Crown prosecutor said Jerry must hang? And hadn't his own lawyers expressed the guarded hope that they could get him imprisoned for life? And here was poor old Corporal Downey, grinning in friendliness and speaking in an offhand way of having Sam Crane turn Jerry loose!

THE HEELS of Superintendent Sam Crane clicked sharply as he leaped to his feet and extended a hand to the figure that crossed the floor toward his desk.

"Hel-*lo!* Downey, you old reprobate! Where in the devil you been? An' what brings you here? Draw up a chair an' pull out the old pipe—unless you've learnt to smoke cigars in your old age. By gad, it's good to see you back in God's country again!" He paused and grinned. "Heard you was in Ottawa—but you don't look as though you'd come from there."

"No, Sam, I've been down North a piece. Fact is, I been kind of forcin' the trail, lately; ain't even shaved fer a week. Got some folks, here, I'd like fer you to meet."

He turned and called to the two who had hesitated just beyond the doorway.

"Come on in, McCarron. I want you should meet Superintendent Crane. Sam, this is Donald McCarron, and his daughter, Marjory."

The superintendent offered his hand.

"Glad to know you, McCarron, and you too, Miss Marjory. Your first trip to Edmonton?"

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose, McCarron, you're up to testify in the Temple case. Except Corporal Brown himself, I see you're the only witness listed for the Crown. Not that there's any more needed. Brown's worked up evidence enough to convict ten men. He won his promotion for his work on that case. The Crown prosecutor was good enough to say that it's one of the best prepared cases he's seen in twenty years of practise."

"Hum," said Downey. "It was about that case we come in to see you. I've been kind of pokin' around up there this summer, Sam, an' there's a little more evidence—"

The superintendent interrupted with a laugh.

"Good Lord, Downey! You can't hang a man but once! The case is all prepared on the evidence we've got; and believe me, it's a plenty."

A young officer, spick and span in a brand new corporal's uniform, bustled importantly into the room with a handful of papers, saluted stiffly and nodded distantly to the old factor.

"Ah, McCarron, here, I see. Did you bring that fox pelt?"

"Aye."

"Brown, I want you to meet Corporal Downey," said the superintendent. "Downey's one of the old-timers on the force."

As the young officer took the proffered hand, his eyes took in from top to toe the unkempt figure that stood beside the girl—a figure that, in truth, looked more like a tramp than an officer of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. His glance shifted with a trace of impatience to the sheaf of papers in his hand.

"Ah, yes—glad to know you, I'm sure." He uttered the words in a pointedly detached voice. "Downey, the name is? Seem to have heard it before. Used to be stationed here, or something, wasn't it?"

"H-u-m, yes—it was, or something," drawled the old corporal, with a grin.

Superintendent Crane reached for the papers.

"I had Brown prepare an extra set to send down to Regina to the school. It'll do the rookies good to see what a really well prepared case looks like."

He passed the papers over to Downey, who glanced through them, wetting his thumb to turn the neatly typed pages, while Corporal Brown fidgeted his annoyance.

"Yump, Sam," he said, when he had finished. "I would send them papers down to Regina if I was you. They look like they was prepared nice an' careful. I don't find no blots nor smudges on 'em, except what jest come off'n my thumb. An' I see quite a few of the words is spelt right—prob'ly all of 'em—which is a damn sight better than I could do. It's a great thing to be educated. Down to Ottawa, when we want to git out a set of papers like that, we got to hire a girl from the business college, an' it cost around nine dollars a week."

Corporal Brown was staring in open mouthed amazement. Never had he heard Superintendent Crane addressed as "Sam" by a corporal—and a corporal who looked like a tramp! Downey grinned into the face of the superintendent, who was regarding him with quizzical eyes.

McCarron's glance sought the floor in embarrassment. It was painful to see this old friend who for years had been known as the best man in the service, standing there babbling foolishly about papers, the real object of his visit, futile as it was, completely forgotten.

Downey was babbling on:

"Yump, Sam, it would be a good thing to learn them rookies typewritin'. It would save hirin' a girl to do it. An' their notes would look nice an' neat—mine's mostly set down in a notebook with the stub end of a lead pencil, an' onct they git cold you got to call in the fire department an' Parliament to read 'em. No, they ain't neat like these papers—no more'n what my uniform is slicked up an' neat like Corporal Brown's. I still got moccasins on from the canoe trip to McMurray, an' I ain't shaved fer a week or two, an' my pants is plumb disgraceful where I've snagged 'em plowin' through the brush. But, about this case, now—when does it go to trial?"

SUPERINTENDENT CRANE was known among the younger officers as something of a martinet, and the amazement of Corporal Brown gave place to an unholy glee as he anticipated the explosion that was to burst about the head of this grizzled non-com, who was deliberately kidding Superintendent Crane to his face. But the explosion did not come. Instead, Sam Crane smiled into the face of this old pal of many a hard trail, as he answered:

"Tomorrow morning. What's on your mind, Downey? What the devil are you driving at?"

Downey fumbled at the papers which he still held in his hand.

"Let's see—what's the charge?"

"Why, murder, of course! No chance in the world for anything but first degree murder."

"Did he confess?"

"No. He won't say a word."

"H-u-m. They ain't no chance, I s'pose, that some triflin' mistake's been made—like Corporal Brown fetchin' in the wrong man?"

Corporal Brown snorted in disgust.

"Mistake!" he sneered. "If ever there was a clean cut, open and shut case, this is it. Ask the Crown prosecutor."

"Did he witness the shootin'?"

"No, but he's handled cases enough to know one when he sees it."

"An' you an' him figure on convictin' this lad you fetched in?"

"Of course we'll convict him! Hasn't the superintendent just told you it is one of the best prepared cases the prosecutor has seen?"

"Oh, the preparin' is all right; I said myself it was a nice neat job. But I was thinkin' about the crime." Downey turned to the superintendent: "If I was you, Sam, I'd save Corporal Brown fer the typewritin' jobs—an' let some one else handle the murders. Fact is, the man he fetched in ain't no more guilty than I am. I slipped over to Quail's after McCarron an' Marjory told me about it, an' I seen right away this here Jerry Temple never

done the killin'. Quail wasn't even killed with a shotgun."

"You're crazy!" cried Corporal Brown. "Half his head blown off, and blood and brains spattered all over the place; and you say he wasn't killed with a shotgun!"

"Yump," said Downey. "You jumped at conclusions, son. I seen a man onct with his *whole* head off, an' blood an' brains strung along fer half a mile, an' even that wasn't a shotgun—it was a train of cars. This here Quail was killed with an old fashioned smooth bore, loaded with a handful of lead slugs hammered out of net sinkers. Here's the slugs, an' one of 'em stuck in a piece of Quail's skull. I panned a couple of more slugs out of his brains, an' dug the rest of 'em out of the wall of Quail's tradin' room."

"Damned nonsense!" cried Brown. "Maybe then you can explain away Temple's tracks in front of the door, and the empty shell that killed Quail, and Temple's fingerprints that he left on the rifle that he placed so it would look like self-defense, and the fact that he stayed away from the post one night, and the fact that he had Quail's fur in possession!"

"Yump, one at a time, son; you're too fast fer me. Mind, I'm gittin' old. Time us old fellers was gittin' weeded out of the service. That's what you told Leith an' McCarron, wasn't it, Brown? Maybe you're right; but let's see—where was we?"

Brown's face was a brick red, and McCarron had raised his eyes from the floor and was regarding Downey with fevered interest. Could Downey answer those questions as he said? If so Brown's case would dissolve like sugar in a toddy. He remembered his devout wish to be present when Brown showed Downey up. A moment ago he was wishing himself anywhere in the world but right here to witness the discomfiture of his lifelong friend. But now—

Downey was speaking.

"In the first place, Temple's tracks was in front of Quail's door because Temple tromped around in the snow—he had to, in order to get in the door—after the Injun told him Quail was murdered.

"An' you mentioned the empty shell that killed Quail— Now, Quail wasn't killed with an empty shell—not even with a loaded one. He was killed, as I said, with a smooth bore loaded with slugs.

"An' Quail's fur wasn't in Temple's possession; it was in the company's possession; an' it was there because Temple had traded for it an' got it from the Injun that killed Quail.

"You found out that Temple was away from the post one night, but you forgot to find out that it was *after* the fur was traded for. If Temple killed Quail the night he was away from the post, the fur must have been in McCarron's loft while Quail was still alive—which ain't reasonable, an' ain't what come about.

"That leaves the fingerprints on the rifle. That looks bad, but it ain't, when you come to think about it. Jerry Temple was in love with Marjory McCarron. He wanted to marry her. He knew she feared and hated Quail with reason. When he found McCarron was goin' to send her up to Quail's with some goods, on their trip to Chipewyan, he made her take his shotgun, and made her promise to carry it loaded all the time she was there. Then she was to take the gun down an' cache it on Fire Island, where he could go and get it, an' he'd know she was safely past Quail's. He went to git it, an' it was there the Injun found him an' told him of the murder. Of course Temple jumps to the conclusion that the girl had shot Quail. She had once said in his hearin', that maybe she'd kill Quail some day—not meanin' it—but jest in the desperation of misery at the thought of marryin' him. But the Injun had said Quail was killed with a shotgun, so Temple's mind connected Marjory with the shootin'.

"He busts up there, an' sure enough it looks at a glance like a shotgun—same as it looked to Brown an' McCarron, later. But, with Quail unarmed, Temple figures the girl might get into trouble, so he figures on makin' a plain case of self-

defense for her. He done wrong in that, of course, but it wasn't no mortal crime—an' him half wild with fear of what would happen to the girl. He claimed he shot a ptarmigan with the shell Brown found. That would account for the blood on the gun barrel. I don't know—it can easily be found out by the precipitation test whether it's human blood or not. It don't make no difference, anyway. It wasn't Quail's blood—that was froze before Temple ever got there. An' that explains why Temple ain't neither admitted nor denied the killin'. If he denied it, he was afraid it would be traced to Marjory McCarron—the woman he loves. An' he didn't admit it, because he didn't do it. I'm bettin' though, if any evidence had been brought out to link the girl up with it he would have admitted it—I believe he's jest that kind—an' they're middlin' scarce."

A LOW, choking cry escaped the lips of the girl, and she raised tear brimming eyes to the old corporal's face.

"He did that for me! He would have—have let them hang him for me!"

"Yump," said Downey, "from what I figure out he'd done jest that."

From brick red the face of Corporal Brown had gone livid with rage and mortification.

"It's damned nonsense!" he cried, in a voice that trembled. "A damned cock and bull story, and a crazy theory to back it up! I'll stake my reputation—"

"Not with me." Corporal Downey grinned. "I'd hate to win it." He turned to the superintendent, "An' now, Sam, I want you should call up the Crown prosecutor an' have him step over here. I want him to turn this here Jerry Temple loose. There ain't a thing on him, an' these two young folks wants to git married. I seen Father Giroux on the street an' told him we'd be ready around supper time."

"But, thunder, Downey! There's more to it than that! It will take several days for him to check over your evidence, and make it all jibe with your theory."

"Check up, hell! He's got all winter to check up! I want Jerry Temple turned loose now—before supper! I ain't goin' to keep Father Giroux waitin'. Temple's either guilty, or he ain't. Quail wasn't only murdered onct, was he? An' I fetched in the Injun that done it, along with his partner, an' a hooch runner I went after. Jim Mogee killed Quail. He confessed, an' so'd the other Injun that was with him. He killed Quail because Quail knocked him down with a scale weight—the robbery was an afterthought. They traded Mogee's own fur first, an' when they seen they had a green clerk to deal with, they slipped up an' got Quail's."

"Losh, mon!" cried McCarron. "How'd ye locate him? Has he still got my stuff?"

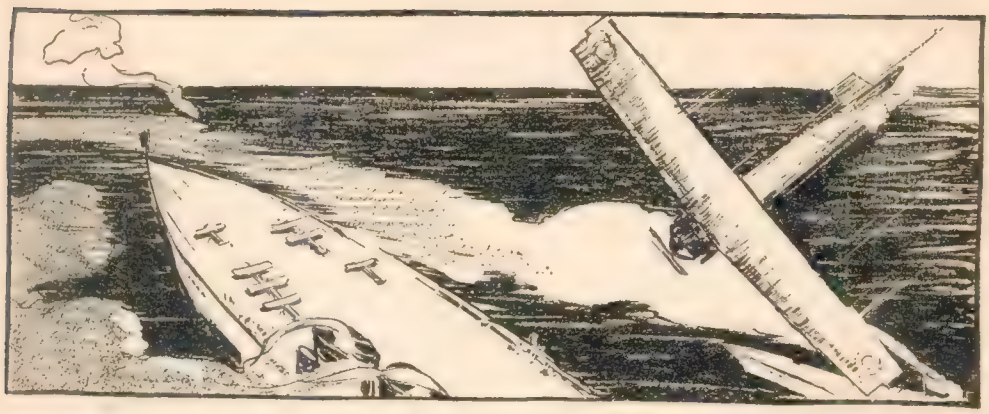
Downey laughed.

"Yes—or its equivalent in fur. It's safe at DuBrochet. An' it wasn't so hard to locate him. Nehwatna told me who done it an' where to find him."

"Nehwatna! Why, the lyin' jade! She told me she didn't know who they was!"

"Yump," said Downey. "But Nehwatna's an old friend of mine. I happened to save her whole band from smallpox twenty, thirty years ago. She'll do a lot for me, but at that, I don't think she'd of come through if I hadn't told her they was goin' to hang Jerry Temple. She loves Marjory an' Jerry Temple, though she's still cussin' him out fer not lettin' them dogs eat Quail. You can't blame her none fer not wantin' to tell. You see, Jim Mogee's her brother."

THE END



RIG THE DECK

A Story of the Navy Airplane Carriers

By FRANK WEAD

THE FORWARD part of the flight deck was well filled with planes when the Nth Fighting Squadron started to come on board. The first pilot slid his ship smoothly into the gear, the second hovered impatiently astern, and the third was Sock McGuire. Sock was flying NF-20, the squadron's second spare. He was flying it because his regular ship and the first spare were at that moment slightly damaged, somewhat forlorn, and sole occupants of the vast hangar space of the *Saratoga*.

Sock S-turned lazily off the stern of the carrier, dreading the moment when he would get the signal to land. The huge flight deck looked very small to him, and he wondered if he would be able to find the groove that seemed to fly a plane automatically on to the deck.

The second ship slid in about five feet over the ramp at the stern, and settled gently down. The gear took hold and brought it to a stop. The pilot hopped out, his parachute dangling like a queer misplaced bustle, and dropped down into the nets that run around the edge of the deck. The handling crew rushed the second plane forward and secured it in place. The gasoline truck pulled alongside just as though the deck were a flying field, and the mechanics began to service the ship and check over the engine and controls.

The flight control officer raised his megaphone. Sock almost seemed to hear the order—

"Rig the deck!"

The gear snapped up into landing position. The red flag at the stern dropped down, and Sock kicked NF-20 through a gentle turn and headed in to land.

He eased the throttle back and nosed down into a shallow glide. A light back

draft from the propeller slipstream suddenly filled the cockpit. It lifted the leather medal and blew it against Sock's chin. His fingers were shaking violently as he captured the medal and tucked it inside his flying jacket. The medal had a cracked-up airplane and the outline of a skull labeled "concrete" burned on it. Sock had had it since the day that NF-3 had skidded in the gear. He would keep it until some other pilot made a bad landing on the carrier.

The stern was nearer now. The white signal flags stood clearly out against the dull red surface of the deck. Sock shifted nervously in his seat and tried to concentrate and stop his hands and knees from shaking. They kept right on shaking anyway.

NF-20 wobbled slightly just before Sock passed over the stern. He was high and fast and the signalmen repeatedly shook their flags at him. Sock did not seem to pay any attention to the flags; perhaps his mind was concentrated on the "island" up there ahead at the starboard side of the deck. The island is composed of eight-inch turrets, the smokestack, and the bridge, and those who have hit it say that it's rather hard.

Sock leveled off about a foot above the gear. The deck and the men in the nets slipped past him in a hazy confused blur. He was high and well forward in his seat in order to see past the leading edge of the lower wing. Hundreds of eyes followed him as they follow every landing. The bored eyes of the Akeley cameramen watched him through their finders. Suddenly they started their cameras. They only photograph landings that look as though they will not be so good. They seem to have sort of second sight about that. The crash alarm rang out sharply and the men working around the ships on the forward part of the deck leaped to the safety of the nets.

For an instant it seemed that Sock was going right on into the barrier that protects the ships parked up ahead if a plane overshoots the gear. The barrier stops them abruptly, almost as quickly as the island does. Suddenly Sock pushed NF-20 toward the deck. The right wheel crumpled and the ship started to swing sideways. The right lower wing dropped hard against the gear, and tore away from the fuselage. The gear screamed as it took hold and jerked the remains of NF-20 to a stop. Sock's body rocked forward against his belt and his forehead kissed the padded cowling with a sharp bump.

He cut the switch, flicked his safety belt open, wriggled free of the straps of his 'chute and hopped out of the cockpit. He took in the crushed wheel and torn wing of NF-20 with a quick, sour glance. Suddenly he realized that he was not trembling any more.

The nervous tension dropped away from the flight deck crews. They lifted the damaged ship and ran her forward on her good wheel, holding the broken wing clear. Even a bad crack-up doesn't slow the deck down very much. The gear snapped into position. Another plane was heading in to land.

Sock sauntered over to the nets, trying to act nonchalant. The flight control officer stared aggrievedly after him.

"My Lord!" he exclaimed. "That bird practically bats a hundred per cent!"

A LOT of the men stared at Sock as he put a hand on the warm deck and dropped down into the nets. The crew took it as a personal matter when any one in the Nth Fighting Squadron cracked up a ship. There were only six officers in the Nth; the other twelve pilots were enlisted men, aviation pilots. Sock was conscious of their faces; and Solinsky's taunting grin stood clearly out among them.

"Rig the deck," said Solinsky with pointed malice.

Sock ignored the remark. He turned to watch the next ship settle down in the gear as lightly as a feather. He felt a friendly arm slide over his shoulders. It was Wally Sprague, his section mate, who had landed in NF-2 just ahead of him.

"Tough," said Wally. "You come in too fast, Sock."

"Yeah," said Sock. "I know."

They stood there, watching the other single-seaters hit the deck. Wally was short, with black hair, shiny brown eyes, and a smooth olive skin that contrasted sharply with Sock's weatherbeaten and freckled face. Sock's reddish brown thatch fluttered in the breeze. There was a tired look in his eyes, and his square shoulders slumped slightly, as though they were tired, too.

Solinsky and his buddies eased up behind them. They were talking loudly for Sock's benefit.

"Some o' these guys can't fly a balloon," said Barnes.

"Gettin' old," said Peterson.

"Rig the deck," said Solinsky.

"Three in a row. One wing low."

"That makes him a Chinese ace."

"Brought down three planes and was in all of them."

"Rig the deck," said Solinsky.

"Rig North Island. He can't land on a little thing like a deck."

Wally turned around.

"You better beat it t'hell out of here," he growled ominously, "if you don't wanta get knocked overboard."

The trio lapsed into a sullen silence.

Sock stared blindly ahead. His fingers were shaking again.

The last squadron made wide lazy circles overhead in a V of three plane sections, awaiting its turn to land. Suddenly it broke into echelon and the planes flew low in succession past the port side of the carrier. The signalman looked each plane over carefully as it passed and then gave the pilot a quick O.K. with his flags, getting a faint wiggle of the flippers in reply.

The squadron turned back toward the stern. The leader turned short as he caught the signal and headed in to land. One after another, with only a brief pause between them, planes dropped on to the carrier. Crews and gear moved with faultless precision. Not a second or a word was wasted.

Sock shifted his position, leaning against the edge of the deck. He suddenly felt easier. He wanted to talk to Wally, but the words would not come to him.

The ships were almost all home now. Two more to go. Solinsky was a tough guy. He had a bullet head and a moon face, and his hands hung low, like an ape's. He had been riding Sock ever since they had been at Pensacola together. Sock had been an instructor there when Solinsky had tried to get through the flight course and qualify as a pilot. Solinsky had not been a very good student, and he did not even solo. The chief instructor had given the record tower a "thumbs down" when he had checked Solinsky after ten hour's dual. Sock had told the chief instructor that Solinsky was not much good. So Solinsky had gone back to manicuring airplanes, after telling everybody that Sock was a rotten instructor. None of the instructors minded cracks like that. They often got them from smart students who did not turn out very well.

Sock had been a tough guy, too, in his time. During the war and for six years after he had been about as tough as they come. Something in him had loved to fight and raise hell. Solinsky was always talking about what a rough liberty he had just made. Sock had never talked very much, but he had made plenty of rough ones, too—when he had been making liberties.

That was before he met Mary and fell in love. Mary had turned out to be very regular. Maybe it was the kids that had slowed Sock down. Two of them now. He had worked like a dog and they owned a swell little home in Coronado. Well, anyway, about thirty per cent. of it was theirs.

Maybe those things had slowed him down a bit. He could not afford to throw his dough away on a lot of rough stuff when Mary and the kids needed it. And then they had formed the Nth Fighting Squadron, the enlisted men's outfit. Every aviation pilot in the Navy wanted to make the Nth. Those who succeeded were on trial. They wanted to make good. They wanted to show the other squadrons that enlisted pilots were O.K.

in the fighting game. And a fellow ought not to run around making trouble when he is trying to put something like that over.

THE LAST plane came smoothly to a stop in the gear. Sock's squadron commander walked across the deck and stood above them, looking down. The Old Man was just a kid lieutenant. He worked them hard and he wanted them to be good, too. He kidded the other squadron commanders and told them that his outfit was better than theirs. The gang got along great with him. Sock and Wally had been pleased when he had picked them to fly in his section. They had practised overtime, and their gunnery scores were right up there with the best of them.

"I guess you keep the leather medal," said the skipper of the Nth Fighting Squadron to Sock, looking down at him with a faint smile.

Sock flushed.

"Yes, sir," he said.

He fumbled at his chest and pulled the leather medal into view. The gang had laughed and kidded him about it the first two times, but this thing was getting serious. Sock guessed that they would just ignore it in the chief petty officer's mess that night.

"Secure" sounded over the loudspeakers scattered throughout the carrier. Men moved the planes aft into their positions for taking off, lashed them firmly to the deck, lashed the controls to keep them from banging about in the wind, covered engines, cockpits and propellors, and drifted below. Wally said something about checking his valve clearances and cleaning plugs. They had NF-20 on the elevator now, were taking it down to the hangar space to park it with Sock's other two wrecks. They were not badly cracked-up. The fleet air base would have all three of them flying a few weeks after the carriers returned to San Diego. Everybody cracked up a plane now and then, but in his heart Sock freely admitted that it was pretty brutal for a bird to wash out three of them in less than ten days.

Sock lay down in the nets. He put his chin on his hands and stared at the water as the bow of the ship neatly parted it and swirled it aft in a white bubbly streak that tried to cling to the armor belt. The gray side of the ship flared outward and towered high over the waterline. The hot sun felt good against his back. He was furious about the third plane. He could not understand why he was so afraid of the deck. Once he had felt very friendly toward it and had admired the almost human cleverness of the gear.

He had made a couple of hundred landings on carriers without so much as blowing a tire. Then all of a sudden he had got afraid of it. Even the good landings that he had made lately had been more luck than anything else. On the good ones the gear had taken the plane away from him and set it down all right without his help. He could not seem to judge his speed and altitude any more. He could not find the groove. Sometimes he got blind on the deck during an approach. He knew that something was wrong but he couldn't tell what it was. And then he'd started fighting the stick and rudder, trying to guess or "wish" her on. That made it worse.

"What d'you think about it, Surg?" The skipper's words came easily to Sock's ears.

"He's all right," the flight surgeon answered. "I looked him over with the regular Tuesday crowd. Heart and blood pressure and pulse are normal. He had a Schneider index of fifteen. You know that's high."

"When a sweet, cosy pilot like McGuire goes bad I know there's something behind it," the skipper retorted. "You birds ought to get up in the air more, and keep closer to the gang. It's the psychology of the thing that counts." Sock's ears burned, but it was too late to disclose his presence.

"Applesauce," retorted the surgeon. "Your squadron isn't the only one on this tub. Try and fly every day and keep

track of this crowd of quiet birdmen and see where you land. I get plenty of time in, anyway."

The skipper laughed.

"Well, we've got to do something about it."

"He's most likely a little stale. Take him off the flight list for awhile."

Sock's heart pounded against his ribs. No fly, no flight pay. And he and Mary had been counting on adding a garage to the house after this cruise was over.

"Fat chance. Not a spare pilot in the outfit. Have to go full strength through these problems."

Sock's heart lifted.

"A lot of old-timers go bad after ten or twelve years of tough flying," said the surgeon. "They take it seriously, and get added responsibilities as they grow older until finally they crack under the strain. They can't relax enough and they don't get any kick out of it. Fighting work is dangerous and hard on a man, anyway."

"Yeah?" said the skipper. "You're a great big lot of help to me."

The flight surgeon laughed.

"Well," the skipper went on, "He draws NF-21 tomorrow. It's our last replacement. If he cracks that one up we'll have to get him a kite."

Their voices died away. Sock pondered over the surgeon's words. He wondered if he was through. Nearly all of the old gang had gone in one way or another. Most of them were flying up there somewhere in squadrons that did not take any part in games of war. Sock suddenly realized that in point of experience he was the oldest active pilot on board. Only a few enlisted men learned to fly in Naval aviation before the war. Sock had been one of them. Most of the old officers were commanders or stokers now, and had jobs that kept them from flying very much. A smile broke Sock's lips as memories of these rollicking early days swept over him. It had been a game then, a game a little above all other forms of sport. He wondered if he would get away with landing NF-21. It always looked bad for a squadron to be flying with a vacant file—like a funeral. He thought of Mary, of three crack-ups in a row, and was solemn again.

THE FLEET was nearing its anchorage off Panama when Sock finally rose to his feet. The *Lexington* was close astern of the *Saratoga*, her sister ship, while the slow and antiquated *Langley* brought up the rear. The other units of the fleet had closed in now, proud super-dreadnoughts, racy destroyers and light cruisers, and lumpy supply and repair vessels of the train sparkled in the tropic sun and moved with slow majesty over the waters of the Pacific.

Sock felt heavy and old. The red meal pennant fluttered at the port yardarm. Chow was nearly over.

The mess table had been cleared away when he entered the chief petty officer's quarters. The air was gray with smoke and men chattered volubly as they shifted into clean whites in preparation for liberty. Advanced battle torpedo practise was scheduled for the following day. The fleet would be split up into two parts, fighting each other. These wars were getting to be an old story now with the fleet concentration period nearing its end. The orders said that they would get underway at four o'clock in the morning. The loudspeakers had already announced that shore leave would start as soon as they were anchored and that it would expire at midnight.

A few of the gang spoke to Sock as he elbowed his way toward his locker. He decided that he would not go ashore. He would look at the movies up on the flight deck and then maybe read for awhile before he turned in. The bustle and lighthearted air of the liberty hounds awakened a queer unrest in Sock, but he fought it back as he always had done recently. At first it had been hard for Sock not to go ashore with the gang and raise Cain. Later on he had grown used to it, and could always kid them back when they wisecracked him about being married and never hitting the beach.

Sock reached into his locker for a tattered magazine. Some one jabbed him in the ribs with an urgent elbow.

"Come on," said Wally. "Get your clothes on. We're goin' to make a liberty."

"I only got four bucks," said Sock. "I can't go ashore."

"That's plenty," said Wally. "I got a roll a porpoise couldn't jump over."

"Go ahead," said Sock. "I'm goin' to turn in early."

"Don't be a clam. We'll just get a few beers an' walk around. I won't lead you astray. It'll do you good to get off of this tub awhile." There was an insistent, pleading note in Wally's voice.

"Aw, I know this town like a book. I never left anything here that was worth goin' back after."

"Jees! You are gettin' old. Come on."

Sock's nostrils dilated as he felt the luring call of Panama. A vision of streets swarming with carefree white clad figures, flickering, smoke dimmed lights, lilting music, and the hazy warmth of the tropics and good liquor swept through his mind.

"Naw," he said suddenly. "Nothin' doin', Wally."

Wally rapped him on the chest with a firmly clenched fist.

"Listen, you sap," he growled. "Forget yourself for a minute. I'm goin' to take you ashore if I have to drag you there."

Sock suddenly realized that he wanted to make a liberty. He wanted it more than he had wanted anything in a long time. He had just been fighting it because that had grown to be a habit with him.

"All right, Wally," he said. "Sure, I'll go."

"Make it snappy," said Wally.

The fifty-footer was jammed to the gunwales. Sock noticed that Solinsky, Peterson and Barnes were seated on the thwart astern of them. The big motor launch ran past Flamenco Island, up the entrance to the Canal and discharged its load at the Balboa Landing.

Sock tripped slightly on the gunwale as he jumped out on to the float, but caught himself with a laugh.

"Rig the deck!" said Solinsky. Sock laughed again.

The heaviness had dropped away from him now, but Solinsky's gibe still make him a little sore.

Wally hailed a Ford jitney. They clambered in.

"Metropole," said Wally.

They had four beers at the Metropole bar.

"Come on," said Sock. "Let's take a look around."

He had forgotten all about his fear of the deck. Even the three crack-ups were far back in his mind. He felt like he always used to feel when a good liberty was building up.

THEY strolled along the Avenida Central, pausing to peer into shops and bazaars. Transplanted Rock Scorpions from Gib, Hindus, native Panamanians and irrepressible sons of the chosen people sang their siren songs at them in vain.

"Wanna fine silk kimono, Chief?" "Buy Panama hat, verra chip?" "Pretty pos'carts?"

Now and then they stopped in a bar for a drink. They had switched to whiskey now and both of them had a little edge on and were feeling pretty good.

"That bird Solinsky," said Wally, "is looking for a rap in the kisser."

"He'll get it," said Sock.

"You been comin' in too fast," said Wally.

"Yeah," said Sock. "I know."

Sock's chest was out. His walk took on a slight swagger. Now and then some one bumped into him and bounced off. This liberty had done him a lot of good already. Wally had been right about that. But he still wondered if he would be afraid of the deck the next time he had to shoot at it. The thought made him feel a little bit numb.

They had a great glow by ten o'clock. Wally took pride in his work. He had

set out to give Sock a liberty and he had almost succeeded. But Wally had not known Sock when he had been making real liberties. He had never known what a tough guy Sock really was.

"Let's go down to Nigger Mike's," said Wally. "They got a Marimba band down there that'd make a Salvation Army girl drop her tambourine and go gugu."

"O.K. with me," said Sock.

So they went to Nigger Mike's.

They stood in the doorway for a moment trying to find a table through the smoky glare of the room. The Marimba band was resting and the place was jammed with sailors and percentage girls.

Solinsky's voice rang clearly above the din and chatter—

"Rig the deck!"

A hot flush of rage surged over Sock. Suddenly he saw Solinsky's face like a moon through the haze, sneering at him. He walked slowly up to Solinsky's table. Before Solinsky knew what it was all about Sock grabbed him by the elbows, lifted him erect and kicked his chair out of the way. A hush fell over the nearest tables and spread in a wave that quickly reached the farthest corners of the room. Solinsky let one go at Sock as soon as the latter stepped back. It was a glancing blow and Sock rode it off his cheek. Then he shook his head and moved in. His elbows were against his sides and his chin was behind his shoulder. His eyes were just a couple of slits and he looked vicious and tough. He hit Solinsky five times before Solinsky could brace himself to throw one back.

Peterson and Barnes got up and kicked their chairs clear. Wally took Barnes out from the side. He landed behind the ear. It broke a small bone in his hand but he did not know it until the following day. Barnes did not know it either. He was on his back trying to move so that the rest of the roof would not fall in on him.

In a second it was anybody's fight. The crowd just picked a side and moved in. Even some of the percentage girls took a hand. Nigger Mike stood helplessly behind the bar with tears rolling down his greasy cheeks.

It was about the best free-for-all ever seen in Panama and Nigger Mike's was shut up for two days after it was over. There was one big fight with Sock and Wally and Solinsky and his gang in the middle of it, and there were a half a dozen private fights around the edge that had started in sympathy—or just for the fun of it.

The fight lasted about ten minutes before the shore patrol whistles began to blow and the nightsticks rattled on the sidewalks.

The fight stopped as quickly as it had started. Front and rear doors were suddenly jammed with sailors on their way out of trouble. Solinsky and Peterson disappeared up an alley, dragging Barnes between them. Wally and Sock took the opposite direction. Nigger Mike's was empty by the time enough of the shore patrol arrived to do anything.

Wally and Sock finally slowed to a walk. They straightened their coats and caps and tried to look dignified. They were exhausted, happy and wet with tropic sweat. Each stole a look at the other.

"You got a couple of pips," said Wally.

Sock gingerly felt of his face.

"You're no rose," he retorted.

"It was a swell riot while it lasted," said Wally.

Sock rubbed his knuckles against his ribs.

"You know it was," he returned.

They were back on the main drag now, easing along through the crowd.

"My edge is all gone," Wally complained.

"So's mine," Sock replied. "Let's have a beer."

They stopped in a hole-in-the-wall bar and had two small beers apiece. The beer was cold and it soothed their parched throats.

"I had a hunch that guy Solinsky was goin' to get a rap on the chin," said Wally.

"Well," said Sock, "he did."

They were silent for a moment.

"Liberty's almost up," said Wally. "Let's go down to the dock."

They hopped a jitney. They got out at the entrance to the Yard and walked slowly down to the landing and clambered into the waiting motor launch. Neither one of them spoke as the launch chugged along among the queer shapes of the anchored fleet.

The gangway lights of the *Saratoga* shimmered against the dark water as they went alongside.

They stopped for an instant at the door to the chief petty officer's quarters.

"I'm sleepin' on deck, on a cot," said Sock. "It's nice an' cool up there."

"Well, goodnight, Sock," said Wally.

"Goodnight, Wally. It's been a swell liberty. It's been one of the best liberties I ever had."

THE FLIGHT deck shook with the drumming of the many air cooled radials as they warmed up. Now and then one screamed at full power and then idled down again into the dull thundering hum. It was just daylight. The deck was slippery with dew and drops of moisture rolled sleazily off the fabric surfaces of the wings. The blurred shapes of the plane guard destroyers, waiting like buzzards in case a plane should go down, were hardly visible on either quarter. Off there in the haze somewhere were the rest of the White forces, and Green, the "enemy."

Sock paused before the position board in the pilot's "ready room." A glance at the varicolored tags showed him that the Nth Fighting Squadron was parked near the center of the deck. The skipper handed him a typed information sheet regarding the day's problem. Sock left the ready room and, carefully avoiding the whirling propellers, made his way across the deck to his ship.

He hastily read the typed information sheet, tucked it into his pocket and climbed into the seat of NF-21. The skipper had smiled as he had handed Sock his slip. Sock had been embarrassed about his face, so he had looked the other way. He wriggled into the harness of his parachute and hooked the straps into place. He fastened his safety belt and pulled his goggles down. He eased the throttle forward and watched the tachometer as NF-21 bucked and shook against the blocks. 2100 revs. Not so bad.

The carrier swung slowly into the wind and increased speed.

Sock noticed that planes were already taking off up ahead. The first ships to leave the deck hung like black bugs against the gray sky and slid into formation just before they were lost in the haze. The leading ships of the Nth Fighting Squadron raised their tails, rolled along the deck and lifted into the air.

A face suddenly caught Sock's eye among the crowd in the nets. It hardly looked like a face, but it was located where a face should have been. The left eye was swollen shut, the lips were puffed and bruised, the right jaw was an egg-like lump. Sock laughed aloud as he realized that the face belonged to Solinsky.

Then suddenly the line of ships just ahead of Sock rolled away from him. He read the number on Wally's ship as it left his side. The flight control officer held up his hand; Sock nodded his head. The flight control officer dropped his hand; Sock pushed his gun wide open and the mechanics jerked the lines that held the chocks under his wheels.

He held her wheels against the deck until the speed lifted him clear.

Over the bow he wobbled for an instant in the slipstream wash of the preceding ships and then pulled her back in a steep zoom. He saw Wally up ahead and to the left, and knew that he was hanging on his prop, throttled way down, waiting for them. The skipper always took off last, so that he could see the rest of the squadron ahead of him. He looked back for the skipper. He was coming fast, nose down and wide open. Sock saw that the deck of the carrier was half empty, and that other planes were leaving it at brief

regular intervals. The *Saratoga* left a broad white wake behind her and the two destroyers were just outside of it.

The skipper zoomed up into position ahead of Sock and Wally. They closed in at once until their props were close to his wings in a tight V. He led them in a slow circle to the left, and section by section the rest of the outfit dropped into position in the formation.

They climbed steadily. At eight thousand feet they passed into a cool stratum of air that caused Sock to shiver and shrug down into the warmth of his flying jacket. Suddenly he realized that he was humming a tune, and that the cool blast of the slipstream felt good against his battered face. He wiggled the ship around lightly. It felt smooth and alive under him. He looked over at Wally and saw him smile and wiggle his flippers almost imperceptibly in reply.

Sock laid his head on the side of the cockpit without taking his eyes off the skipper and let the cool air blow into his open mouth. It made a tooth hurt, so he closed his mouth and wondered if his face would be all healed up by the time he got back to Mary. Then he thought that it was great to be up there alone in a ship with the rest of the gang flying formation around him; but his heart sank and he suddenly felt weak and sick as he remembered that he had to land on the deck.

Sock watched his compass so that if anything happened he could find his way back to the *Saratoga* alone. At sixteen thousand feet the skipper headed West. The sun was burning the haze, and now and then they caught a glimpse of the water or men-of-war through holes in the white blanket of fog below them. By six-thirty the day was bright and clear and the fog was entirely gone.

THEY were in the "enemy" area now. The skipper wiggled his flippers for attention. Sock could sense that the formation had tightened in, that every eye was sweeping the sky for other ships. Down there below them scouting planes and spotters were sending out information by radio; torpedo planes and bombers were assaulting the opposing fleets with small paper bags of flour or potatoes in lieu of cased TNT, or in one or two personal cases with eggs. White billowy curtains of FM from aircraft blended with black smoke from the funnels of the light forces and screened the attacking units from the enemy; and huge groups of destroyers massed, leaped forward to launch their torpedoes against the enemy battle line and hastily retired. The torpedoes with their light exercise heads ran shallow and left a straight creamy wake behind them. Sock saw two of them strike a battleship at the same instant.

Suddenly as if from nowhere, the enemy spotting circuit passed under Sock's wing. The line of seaplanes was almost in column and cloth enemy streamers fluttered from every wing tip. He shoved NF-21 over in a vertical dive, well knowing that the rest of the outfit would follow him to the attack. He eased his throttle back and pulled out of his dive exactly on the tail of the last spotting plane. He pressed his triggers down and snapped a few pictures with his camera gun, then hopped it and did the same thing to the next in line. The other enemy ships were well taken care of by the rest of the squadron by then, so Sock made a note on the pad strapped on his knee of the numbers of the two that he had bagged, and then eased off to one side and did barrel rolls and wingover eighths until he caught the skipper's sharp zoom as a signal to reform.

They climbed again. In a few minutes they ran across an enemy fighting squadron on patrol. This was tougher game. The dogfight fanned quickly out across the sky. Sock chased tails with a rival until he finally nursed him into his sight. 5-F-7. Sock put the number and time down on the pad. An instant later he saw 5-F-7 riding Wally's tail and thought that some people did not have sense enough to go home when they were killed. It was always embarrassing at confer-

ences to claim a lot of stuff and then have some umpire announce that you had been shot down before it all happened. Well, they doped it all out like that and studied the camera gun pictures and then decided which side had won the blinking war. It was a great scheme, but the defeated side always claimed that the reports were wrong and that the umpires were cock-eyed.

Then suddenly Sock got a crack at 5-F-1. In two tight half-rolls he was on its tail.

The squadron no sooner got back into formation again than it was thrown into another scrap. For three hours they roved across the sky, picking up stragglers or fighting in little groups here and there. Sock's arm ached from throwing his plane around. He liked the game and NF-21 was a sweet flying ship.

Sock had nine ships on his list and had never been in front of an enemy's sights when the skipper finally signaled them into formation for the trip home. The Nth Fighting Squadron had had a good day. They were happy. Their formation was tight but easy, and the two wing pilots in the rear section kept looping out of formation and then zooming back into position all the way home.

A funny feeling gripped at Sock's heart as he saw the deck of the *Saratoga* there below him. The air was clear of ships. They were the first squadron to return.

Relaxation dropped away from the carrier as a fighter drops his bathrobe on the canvas floor of the ring. The flight deck was suddenly filled with scurrying khaki clad officers and men in dungarees. The men quickly inspected the gear, tested signals and took their places for handling planes as the carrier turned into the wind. The pilot signalman flicked his cigaret over the stern and unwrapped his flags with a deft twist.

The boys were coming home. The morning's war was over. One by one tiny planes would drop down out of the clouds and come to rest on the bosom of their mother.

The skipper swung the Nth Fighting Squadron into echelon, flew low past the side, and then turned back to land.

The skipper and Wally both landed smoothly ahead of Sock. The men on deck ran Wally's ship up ahead of the gear and then Sock caught the flag as a signal to come on. He headed toward the deck. Suddenly he realized that he was tense, and almost fighting the stick. He rubbed his tongue over his lips. His upper lip was swollen and salty and his tongue made it feel good. A vision of Solinsky's face flashed through his mind. He laughed and his tenseness dropped away from him. Suddenly he was sure of himself. He was a part of his plane and he was not afraid of hitting the deck any more. He was almost at the stern now. He was fast and high. He cut the gun and dropped her down to the proper level. It felt good to be in the groove, and to get a steady O.K. from the signalman. He eased neatly in over the stern and ran into the gear in a perfect landing.

He hopped out and dropped into the nets beside Wally. Nobody said anything.

"Plane coming in," droned the flight control officer's talker.

"Rig the deck!" barked the flight control officer through his megaphone.

The last ship to land was XF-18. It skidded slightly as it entered the gear. It nosed over as the gear jerked it to a stop, splintering the prop and twisting the landing struts.

Sock fumbled at his chest as he climbed out of the nets and walked across the deck. With a friendly grin he handed the pilot of XF-18 the leather medal.

The skipper of the Nth Fighting Squadron stopped Sock as he turned away, and looked shrewdly at his face.

"You haven't been cracking them up without my knowing it, have you?" he asked.

Sock gingerly felt of his bruises.

"No, sir," he said. "It was just a friendly little argument."

STALLIONS *of the* STORM

By HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS

NEVER to ride again,
Never to know
The rush of wind and rain,
The tang of the mountain snow?

Never again to feel
A good horse between my knees?
To watch the ponies wheel
To the swing of quirt and steel—
The hot dust driving down the breeze?

Tom and Tonto and Charley Lee down in the street
And done.
The Kid? Yes, he was white.
Only him left on his feet—
And an empty gun.
My horse shot down,
Somehow The Kid drags me out of the fight
And Vegas town.

Well, if a posse follow. . . .
Here at the shack
In Horsethief Hollow,
All they'll find is a dog with a broken back.
The Kid could laugh at that.
Laugh and pull down his hat—
"So long, Pecos! you're damn near done;
And I'm short of shells."
But he left a load in my gun.

Never to ride again,
High trail or low?
The wheel is dead;
The ball stops on the black
And I played red.

Never to ride again,
High trail or low?
But there's a load in the gun
Whenever I want to go.

Mountain shadow and evening star . . .
A breeze ran up from the desert dim:
A breeze? Or an echo, faint and far?
A whisper of "Water!" and "Pecos Jim!"
Dreams that torture and dreams that lie!
The Kid on foot—and his canteen dry?

Mountain shadow and evening star . . .
A breeze ran up from the desert dim,
Flicker of red and a fading scar
Of lightning over the cañon rim.
In Horsethief Hollow the hurrying beat
Of the quick, sharp rain like galloping feet.

East and West, uprearing breast to breast,
Treading the dark pines under,
Cloud stallions surged and battled—hoof and crest
White flame and thunder.

Never to ride? What horses these?
What silver herd of the Pleiades?
Stardust filly and Steeldust sire,
Ranging meadows of foam and fire;
Tempest driven and phantom led!
Stallion, devil, or thunderhead,
Shod with fury and girt with might:
Never to ride? But I'll ride tonight!

Gather your mares, your silver mares,
Whistle your wild mares from the sky.
Down where the desert lightning flares
The sand is white, the pool is dry.

The Kid will laugh. "What silver mares are these?
What borrowed brand has got you on the run,
Pecos? A thousand head? You're hard to please.
A thousand head? I'll match you coins for one."

What silver mares? A cloudburst when they mill.
Rain on the lowlands, rain along the hill.
Water? The deep arroyo's foaming red.
Kid, if your're thirsty, bow your neck and drink.
Now you can laugh—I roped a thunderhead!

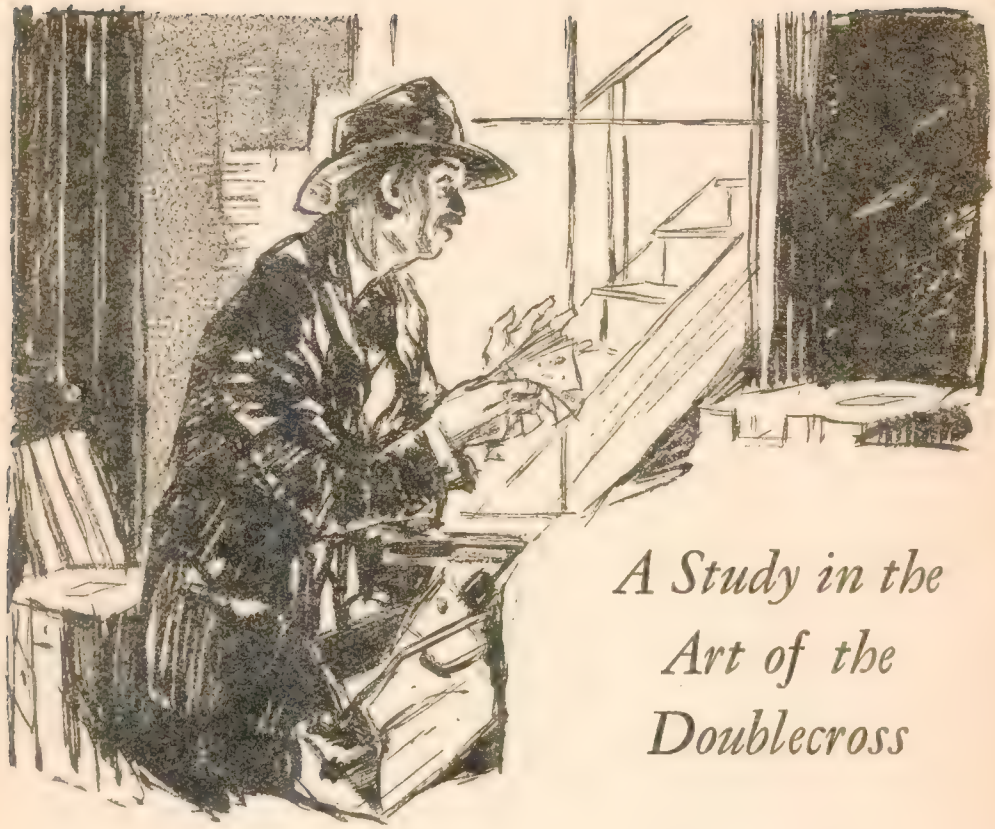
"You rode a cloudburst? Roped a thunderhead?
Pecos, you're loco—drop your crazy talk.
Pass your canteen . . . mine's empty . . . horse dropped dead.
I been in hell afoot—a damn long walk!
Pass your canteen!" But in the lightning flare
Only the hoofprint of a giant mare.

Only the rain that leaped to fill the pool.
On hand and knees The Kid drank, eyes astare.
"I'm dreaming wild . . . Those silver mares? The stud?
This, water? Pecos always was a fool;
Ask for a drink—he'd wrangle up a flood!"

In Horsethief Hollow the storm, the splendor gone,
The stallion of the tempest, ranging far,
Trailed with his silver consorts down the dawn,
Grazing the pastures of the morning star:
Sharp dawn that roused the outlaw Pecos Jim,
Brushed a wild vision from his fevered eyes,
Staring beyond the purple cañon rim,
The rigid pines, the unremembering skies:

Never to ride again,
High trail or low?
But there's a load in the gun
Whenever I want to go.

Whenever I want to go?
I'll ride for myself a spell.
How The Kid would laugh! I'll cross the ridge
And run me a brand in hell.



A Study in the Art of the Doublecross

HE HELD THE BAG

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

OLD TOBY STROUPE, bank messenger, was not supposed to have a key to the black bag in which he daily, for years, had transported cash money through the streets from one bank to another. It was the custom of his employers, on sending Stroupe out with a shipment, to lock the bag. The assistant cashier on the receiving end would always have a master key, would open the bag and check the contents on delivery by the messenger.

Nevertheless Toby Stroupe did have a key. He had acquired one years ago, and had long been waiting his day of illicit opportunity. At heart Stroupe was a thief.

Stocky, stolid, unimaginative, his hair turning gray, for twenty years a trusted servant of the Commonwealth National, Toby Stroupe was nevertheless a thief. For as a man thinketh, so is he. And for a long time Stroupe had been thinking:

"How can it be done? Surely there is a way. Why should I grow old as a packhorse for the rich? Why don't I, myself, open that black satchel?"

These had been his thoughts, but he had never been able to see just how he could get away with it. The will was his; he lacked only the way.

It was Gleason who showed him the way.

"Listen, Stroupe, it's duck soup," said Gleason one night in Stroupe's room.

The two men formed a contrast in every manner except one, and that exception was that each was impatient to gain in worldly wealth more rapidly than could be accomplished by the dribbling increments of honest wage. By that single, common characteristic they were linked. Gleason knew that Stroupe was a bank messenger. Stroupe knew that Gleason was an exploiter of his own wits, who toiled not nor spun, who usually talked from the corner of his mouth. Half Stroupe's age was Gleason, but with thrice his wits.

"Listen, Stroupe, it's duck soup. How you ever goin' to get ahead on thirty a week? Get wise and pick the cherries while they're ripe. I'll hold the basket myself."

Stroupe brooded sluggishly, stroking his bluish chin. He, in fact, considered the question of getting ahead on thirty a week. Truth was that Stroupe already was ahead to the extent of a neat savings account in the Prudential. That was not the bank in which he was employed. He had patronized the Prudential because it paid four per cent. on savings, while the Commonwealth National only paid three. Stroupe was canny; he had been jealous and provident of his earnings all these years. Trouble was that his savings were not enough. He was getting old; time would come when he would not be able to trot the streets with a black bag. He now took out his Prudential passbook and looked at the total of his honestly banked fortune.

$10,162.50.

Real money. But Stroupe wanted more. Now if he could only double or treble that sum—

"I'll hold the basket myself," Gleason was repeating in slyly whispered falsetto. "Get wise. All you got to do is to walk down 10th Street with a bag o' money. You do that every day, don't you? But supposin' you tip me off to some trip when you got more than a jag of hot bonds in that bag. Some trip when you're shaggin' the real cush, see? You come dubbin' along the walk with your bag of cush, mindin' your own business. And your business will be to come along the curb side of the walk, right close to where I got my car parked, engine hummin'. I step out on the runnin' board and crowd a gat against the third button of your vest. 'Drop that bag,' I holler. And naturally you drop it.

"It'll be the busiest time of the day. They'll be all of fifty suckers on the sidewalk, in that same block. What of it? They won't do nothin' but gawk. You drop the bag. I soak you on the beezer with my bare knuckles and down you go. I glom the bag and I'm off. Your bank won't lose nothin, because they're bonded. They notify the bonding company, who send their dicks around about four hours too late. Why, it'd be a safe lay even if there was a harness bull on the next corner. Later, you and me meet for the payoff."

Mr. Gleason leaned back with a wise smirk and lighted a cigaret. Stroupe sat opposite—they had been playing pitch for twenty-five and ten—and mopped the sweat from his brow while he pondered the proposal.

"No, it won't do," Stroupe at length objected. "For one thing I wouldn't trust you, Gleason."

"Whatta you mean?" chirped Gleason with an air of being painfully grieved.

"How do I know I'd come in at the payoff?" queried Stroupe. "You'd get the bag, all right. But how do I know I'd ever see you again?"

"You wouldn't have to see me again," explained Gleason, cocking one eye and leaning forward over the table. "You'd pay yourself off *before* the stickup, see?"

Stroupe gaped.

"I don't make you," he admitted in sincere puzzlement.

"Listen," whispered Gleason from beneath his cupped palm. "Get wise, Stroupe. All you gotta do is buy a big nine inch by twelve inch manila envelop.

You know the kind—like lawyers use, or the size you could mail a magazine in, flat. Got that in your nut now? All right. You stick about fifty cents worth of stamps on the envelop. You address it to John J. Thompson, care General Delivery, any town in this State. You fold this envelop and have it ready in your coat pocket. Nothing hard about that, is there?"

Toby Stroupe, staring dully from orbs which were entirely inexpressive of imagination, nevertheless admitted that there was nothing hard about that.

"All right," pursued Gleason. "You got the envo all framed. Then some day when you leave the bank with real cush, say anything from twenty to fifty grand in bills, you flash me the tipoff by havin' the bow of your hat band on the right 'stead of the left side. I'm watchin' from across the street, see? I drive my car around the corner and park it on 10th Street. You cut through some arcade, or through the lobby of some office building. You step into a telephone booth, or say a janitor's broom closet, or maybe a vacant room, for about thirty seconds. You've got this booth or vacant room spotted in advance, see? You're in there about thirty seconds; that's all you'll need. You open the bag and grab off, say, ten grand. You pay yourself off. How? It's duck soup, Stroupe. You cram them bills—say two packages of centuries—into your stamped and addressed envo. Seal it. Lock the bag and saunter out. At the first mailbox you mail your own rakeoff, see? On you go, toward whatever bank you're delivering your money to. But you pass my car and—I'll do my stuff, Stroupe. I'll bounce my knuckles off your beezer, that's all. I'm gone with the black bag, with what's left after you've taken out ten grand."

So slow were the wits of Toby Stroupe that even then the thing was not clear to him. Gleason explained patiently.

"Listen. The next day you go to the post office where you mailed the envelop and call for the mail of John J. Thompson. Only don't use that name. It's too common. Some real John J. Thompson might beat you to it. Pick a long, hard name. Don't even tell me what town you address the envelop to. That's the butter on your bread—mine'll be what's left in the black bag. I'll get the big end, naturally, but why shouldn't I? I got to make the stickup play, ain't I? I got to flash a gun, ain't I? That's a life rap risk, Stroupe, so I got to have everything above ten grand. And you don't tip me till you're freightin' important money, see? All in your nut now?"

It was not, by a long way. Gleason had to go over and over the scheme.

"It's foolproof," Gleason insisted. "I can't doublecross you, because you've picked your own cherries before you hep past my stand. You can't doublecross me, because after you've picked your own cherries you've simply got to be stuck up. If you ain't stuck up, you won't be covered. You wouldn't dare show up at the receiving bank with the bag ten grand short. Pick a flaw in it if you can, Stroupe."

Stroupe could not. He was beginning to understand, and once he understood, his avarice was whetted to the keenness of a knife. For twenty years Stroupe had been messenger for the Commonwealth National. For twenty years he had trod the treadmill of his daily rounds, like a faithful mule of burden, earning at length the entire trust of his employers. Yet, all that while, beneath the surface he had nursed a grudge. Little had his employers dreamed that Toby Stroupe was by temperament an anarchist, sore and rebellious that he could touch or take no increment from the riches which he portered from vault to vault. Now at last the way was shown by Gleason and the cupidity of Stroupe was fanned to fever pitch.

He licked his lips. Ten thousand dollars! With thirty seconds of work he could double the savings of twenty years.

"Details," pursued Gleason. "There ain't but one detail, and that's to have the big envelop ready, stamped and addressed. A nine by twelve manila envo, Stroupe. Address it care of General

Delivery, any town in the State. The next day after the stickup, take a layoff. Play sick. Anything for a stall. Then ride the rattlers to that town and call for your mail. These G. D. clerks, Stroupe, don't require any identification. You give your name and if there's any mail there for that name you'll get it. No big hurry, either. They hold G. D. mail, unless it's got a return address on the outside, for thirty days. It's duck soup, Stroupe."

"But some one," objected Stroupe, "by that same name might happen in and call for his mail."

"Use a long, hard name," advised Gleason. "Like Pumperdinck. No, that sounds phony on the face of it. Lautermilk. That's better. Use any initials you want. Don't tell anybody what postoffice you mail it to. And address the envo with a typewriter; there's one downstairs in the office of this rooming house."

Stroupe's lips moved in three syllables. He was repeating to himself the name, Lautermilk. So lusterless was his imagination that no other long, unusual name came to inspire his mind.

THE NEXT day Toby Stroupe went about his errands as usual. From ten to three he transported his black bag on several trips, between his own and other banks.

In the course of these rounds, he selected the site for the execution of the crime. It was in a blind corridor jutting off the Rutgers Arcade. The Rutgers Building, in the middle of the block, extended from Walnut to Main. An arcade tunneled it, a roofed alley lined with shops, and Stroupe had often used this arcade as a short cut on his errands.

In the jutting blind corridor just off the main passage of the arcade there was a vacant shop room. It was not locked, for there was nothing within to steal. A stairway partially hid its entrance. That day, in reconnoiter, Stroupe found that it was exactly suited to the program of his crime.

Work done for the day, he purchased a big manila envelop and stamps. He stamped the envelop and went home. The dingy office of his rooming house was deserted. Among its shabby equipment was a typewriter. On this machine Stroupe addressed his envelop, tapping out the letters with a hesitant, unpractised finger. The address he wrote was:

J. O. LAUTERMILK
CARE GENERAL DELIVERY
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI.

For why, thought Stroupe, should he address it to a town up-State? Why not use the convenient postoffice in this, his own city? The stall of getting a layoff, of taking a train trip, did not suit him. He did not want that ten thousand dollars to lie unnecessarily long, in a G. D. pigeonhole, to be thumbed a thousand times before he called for it. And Stroupe knew that small town postal clerks are likely to be curious. Big town postal cerks are used to strangers; they habitually face long queues of them. A name—"Here you are, Mr. Lautermilk"—and the thing was done. He need not encourage suspicion by taking a layoff and a trip to an up-State town.

So that was that. Stroupe folded the envelop and placed it in the inside pocket of his coat.

Repairing to his second floor room, he hung his coat on the rack. That evening Gleason came in, a cigaret draped from his lip, as cockily insouciant as ever. Gleason hung his coat on the same rack. Shortly they were playing pitch for a quarter the game and a dime the setback.

Stroupe won a dollar and eighty cents. His was just the sort of temperament to become aglow at even piker winnings. He became lustfully aglow now, and Gleason fanned the flame.

"All primed for the duck soup, are you, Stroupe? Got that envo fixed up?"

"I'm all set," responded Stroupe. "And say, tomorrow's the thirty-first."

"What about the thirty-first?" asked Gleason eagerly.

"My bank makes a delivery to the Kaw Valley Trust on that date. At least it has

for the last three months. Some contract obligation, I think. Twenty-five thousand cash each time, and some bonds."

"The bonds are out, but the cash sounds good," crowed Gleason, cracking his fingers. "Fifteen grand for me and ten for you. If that happens tomorrow, tip me with your hat band, Stroupe."

Stroupe agreed, and in lowered voices they discussed details.

"The Kaw Valley Trust is at 10th and Baltimore," reminded Gleason. "So we'll frame the stickup for 10th Street, halfway between Main and Baltimore, right in front of the Empire Billiard Parlors. Picked out your telephone booth yet?"

Stroupe nodded. He did not tell Gleason that, instead of a booth, he had chosen a vacant shop room in the Rutgers Arcade. That part of it did not concern Gleason.

Gleason dealt a new pitch hand, then fumbled in his pocket for a cigaret. Finding none, he went to his coat which hung on the wall rack. He fumbled again in his coat, and then said:

"Stroupe, I'm out of coffin nails. Wait a minute while I step down to the corner drug store." He went out.

In five minutes he was back with cigarets but, fumbling again in his vest, he failed to find matches. He went to the coat rack again and, after going through nearly every pocket in his coat, returned to the table with matches.

Luck remained with Stroupe. By the end of the session he had won another dollar and sixty-five cents.

AT ONE o'clock the next afternoon Toby Stroupe emerged from the marble columned portal of the Commonwealth National, at the corner of 9th and Walnut. The bow of his hatband was turned toward the right side. He carried a heavy black bag, containing twenty-five thousand in currency and a like amount in bonds.

Looking across the street, he saw Gleason seated in a parked automobile. Gleason looked carefully at Stroupe, at his bag, at his hat, then started the car. The car moved up Walnut to 10th, then turned west on 10th.

Stroupe proceeded along the Walnut Street sidewalk, south, until he came to the Rutgers Arcade in the middle of the block. Into this roofed avenue of pedestrian traffic he turned as he had often turned before as a short cut to Main Street.

Midway of the arcade he came to the jutting blind corridor, one side of which was used for stairs to the upper floors. There were a hundred people in the arcade, which was one of the most popular retail centers of the city. Every one was hurrying, minding his own business.

Likewise hurrying and minding his own business went Stroupe. He turned quickly into the blind corridor and passed behind the staircase. Because a certain shop room there was so obscured, it had been difficult to lease. It was without tenant now; Stroupe entered, closing the door behind him.

Thirty seconds had been the estimate of Gleason, and Stroupe hardly exceeded it. He took the little brass key which he was not supposed to have, but which he did have, and opened the black bag. On the very top were two packages of hundred dollar bills, each bound with a band and labeled "Five Thousand Dollars."

Quickly from his inside coat pocket Stroupe produced the nine by twelve manila envelop. He unfolded it, flattened it, inserted the ten thousand dollars. He sealed the envelop. It was already stamped and addressed. Stroupe relocked the bag with his key. He knew now that he must never be found with this key in his possession. So he threw it into a trash littered corner of the room.

Out into the arcade he went, bag in one hand and fat manila envelop in the other. At the Main Street entrance there was a huge mail box, of the size suitable for the reception of parcel post packages.

Stroupe was about to drop his manila envelop in the box when he paused, glancing at the address to be sure it was right. It was, or at least in that swift inspection

he thought it was. His mind aided by his memory, he read:

J. O. LAUTERMILK
CARE GENERAL DELIVERY
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI.

Actually the address on the envelop read:

J. D. LAUTERMINK
CARE GENERAL DELIVERY
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI.

Stroupe mailed his parcel, then hurried on into Main Street with his black bag. So far he had lost only a minute from the true schedule of his errand.

He turned south on Main to 10th, where he crossed over. He took the north sidewalk on 10th, proceeding west toward Baltimore. He was a-sweat with suspense now. His heart was in his throat. At the curb just ahead he could see Gleason's car, parked squarely in front of the Empire Billiard Parlors.

The vital drama was at hand. Stroupe moved forward to meet it, fearful, trembling, indeed in the clutches of a desperate funk, yet impelled to meet it, for now he simply must be robbed of the black bag. He had stolen his own loot—the rest must go by the hand of Gleason, else his own crime would be exposed.

Alike fearful to dodge his fate and fearful to engage it he moved on, close to the curbward side of the walk. The street was roaring with traffic; the walk was an eddy of pedestrians scurrying west and east. Business men, women shoppers and newsboys rubbed elbows with Stroupe as he proceeded onward to keep criminal tryst with Gleason.

Would Gleason strike him too hard? Would Gleason batter his skull with the barrel of a gun? The man had promised to punish only with his bare knuckles. Would he? Stroupe wore a ghastly, sweat streaked pallor as he reached the rear wheel of Gleason's car.

He flinched, shut his eyes and strode on. Anticipation of the violence almost made him faint. Then he was aware that he must have passed the running board of Gleason's car. He turned, looked back; it was Gleason's car, all right; but it was quite empty. The motor was not running.

Stroupe paused. Where was Gleason?

Through the screen of pedestrians between him and the plate glass front of the Empire Billiard Parlors, Stroupe saw Gleason.

Gleason was inside at the forward table. He was playing pool with two quite reputable strangers, if appearance counted. Gleason had shed his coat and vest. The hips of his trousers were exposed, and Stroupe could see that he wore no gun.

Stroupe stood agape, holding the black bag. He himself had already rifled that bag of ten thousand dollars. Here was ironic fiasco. Here was the direst of disasters. Gleason, thought Stroupe, must have got cold feet. Gleason had lain down on him like a yellow dog.

And now he saw Gleason turn, leaning against the pool table as he chalked his cue. Stroupe's eyes sought him imploringly. Gleason smiled, shook his head, turned back for another shot.

Stroupe moved west along the 10th Street walk, a mist almost blinding his eyes so that he could hardly see the bulk of the Kaw Valley Trust Company as it loomed ahead. He stumbled. He righted himself, moved onward in augmenting panic. The bag, though lightened by ten thousand in loot, weighed on his arm like a pig of iron, weighed like the guilt which lay stark athwart his soul and was dragging him into the pitchiest slough of despair.

He went on with leaden feet. He came to Baltimore, before the entrance of the Kaw Valley Trust. His destination! Could he go in and deliver his bag ten thousand short? Prison! Prison walls it would mean, and Stroupe knew it. He cursed Gleason for a quitter. He cursed his own folly. He cursed bitterly that tiny brass key which he should not have had, but which he had had, and with which he had thought to unlock a golden door. Instead it would only unlock for him, Stroupe, the grating of a felon's cell.

So he cringed on by the portal of the Kaw Valley Trust. He turned north on Baltimore, toward 9th, without even the desperate inkling of a plan. Other than a vague idea that if he walked around the block Gleason might be ready on his next circuit.

But in his heart he knew better than that. Gleason would be fool indeed to walk out of that billiard hall, in shirt sleeves, to rob a bank messenger. No, the man had cold feet; he had lain flat down on the job.

Stumbling, Toby Stroupe went on, aging with the minutes, as though his feet were already shackled by ball and chain. On without hope or plan. He passed the University Club, came to the dusty, chipped facade of the old York Life Building, turned east on 9th. On, still holding the bag which was ten thousand short, without hope or plan to illumine his vista of despond.

Yet the succor he sought, the saving alternative, loomed before him even now. There ahead at the next corner, at 9th and Main, he saw tall letters across the front of the Flatiron Building:

PRUDENTIAL SAVINGS BANK
4% ON SAVINGS DEPOSITS

And, seeing this, Stroupe paused. The sweat of his brow turned cold and hot and again cold. Like beads of frost it first chilled, then burned. But he saw the way out. It was a hideous alternative, an alternative to turn his heart gray within his breast; but—Stroupe shivered—it was better than prison walls, better than a cage of iron bars.

Stroupe started on and fairly raced toward the doors of the Prudential Bank.

When he was in there he took out his savings passbook, opened it. The tears started from his eyes as he ran over the memos of his savings, and as he thumbed the pages of this little book which was the diary of his providence. What patient sacrifice was here! These figures in black and red, deposits and interests, long columns, page after page—here were the hard won sureties of comfort in his old age. Here were the only lasting footprints he had left on the treadmill of twenty years.

The total—$10,162.50.

IT WAS the only way out. Stroupe took it. His fingers shaking as with an ague, he wrote a savings check for ten thousand dollars. The black bag still clutched in his left hand, he took the check to the savings window.

"I'm making an investment," he said huskily, and pushed the check through the wicker.

"Hope it's a safe one, Mr. Stroupe," remarked the teller, arching his eyebrows in surprise.

"It's the only safe one," returned Stroupe in a hollow voice.

Yet even then he was thinking that it was, after all, safe. All he need lose would be a day's interest. Tomorrow he would call for the mail of J. O. Lautermilk and then immediately redeposit this same amount.

"You want a cashier's check, of course," suggested the teller.

"No. The cash, please," requested Stroupe quaveringly. "Hundred-dollar bills, if you have them."

The teller paid them. He passed to Toby Stroupe a hundred hundred-dollar bills. Stroupe jammed them in his pockets and hurried from the bank.

His plan was definite now. He walked briskly a half block south, to the west entrance of the Rutgers Arcade. At the arcade entrance he paused for a moment before the mail box in which fifteen minutes ago he had dropped the manila envelop. To his eyes the thing now took a grotesquely hideous shape, like a monster—this huge steel parcel mail box which stood upright on four legs, with its round bald dome, with its padlocked ears, with its tight lipped slit of a mouth which had swallowed the hopes of Toby Stroupe.

On into the roofed arcade he went, to its center, and into the blind corridor back of the stairs. In a trice he was in the vacant shop room. He was on his knees in

the corner of it, clutching, clawing at the trash, delving desperately for the tiny brass key.

He found it. He opened the black bag. As though they burned his fingers, he crammed therein the hundred hundred-dollars bills. He relocked the bag. A moment more and he was out, dodging through the arcade shoppers toward the Main Street entrance.

Three minutes later, breathless, he entered the Kaw Valley Trust at 10th and Baltimore.

"Hello, Toby," the assistant cashier greeted him. "Billings of the Commonwealth phoned that you were on your way over here. When I said you hadn't arrived, he was a little worried. I told him to keep his shirt on. I reminded him that Toby Stroupe was slow but sure. And here, sure enough, you are! Whatta you got for us today, Toby? Have a cigar?"

The assistant cashier took possession of the black bag, and Stroupe of a prime perfecto. He lingered, did Stroupe, standing by for the checkup. The cashier had opened the bag with a key of his own. He was now perusing the slip of memoranda, checking off the items, currency so and so, bonds so and so.

"K. O, Toby. It's all here."

Stroupe took the receipt and left. Passing the Empire Billiard Parlors on 10th Street, he looked in from the corner of his eye. Gleason was still playing pool.

At five o'clock Stroupe was released from his duties at the Commonwealth National. He hurried to the Main Street entrance of the Rutgers Arcade. On the mail box there he read:

HOURS OF COLLECTION
9 A.M.; 11 A.M.; 4:45 P.M.

So he knew that his manila envelop had been picked up by a postman at 4:45. How long would it take to sort the mail and get his own packet to the G. D. window? More than likely not before closing time that night.

Stroupe now went to the general postoffice at 8th and Grand. In the corridor there he found a window which was marked: "General Delivery, H to M, open 8 A.M. to 6 P.M." He decided to linger until one minute of six and then call for his mail in the name of J. O. Lautermilk.

He did so and was informed, after a shuffling of the letters in the "L" pigeon holes—

"Nothing for you, Mr. Lautermilk."

Stroupe withdrew. He had hardly expected such quick service. The mail clerk closed the window for the night and Stroupe went gloomily home.

Gleason did not call around that evening. Stroupe had a vague hunch that he would never see Gleason again.

Yet as he lay restlessly on his bed that night, Stroupe could not discard Gleason from his mind. What had been the man's game? Surely, thought Stroupe, there had been some method in his guile. And then a horrible possibility awoke in the bank messenger's brain. Suppose that Gleason had had no other purpose than to trick Stroupe into mailing the package. Suppose that Gleason meant to call for it himself.

Stroupe recalled that he had actually used the same name, Lautermilk, which had been suggested by Gleason. The office of address, however, had been his own idea, not confided to Gleason. Still, Gleason might have found it out. He tossed on his bed and allowed his mind to retrace the steps of his preparation.

Suddenly he sat bolt upright, as a fearful conviction struck him. He recalled that Gleason had gone to his coat on the coat rack. He had made two trips to the coat rack. Suppose Gleason had peeked into Stroupe's coat pocket and observed the exact name and address on the big envelop—

That ended sleep for Stroupe. He was up at dawn. He went downtown without breakfast. For two hours he haunted the corridor of the general postoffice. From six till eight he paced there, waiting for window "H to M" to be opened.

If that was Gleason's game, he would beat Gleason to it. Surely the package

had been sorted during the night. Stroupe resolved to be the first man in line when the window opened.

He was.

"Mail for J. O. Lautermilk, if you please?" he asked quaveringly.

The clerk shuffled many letters and then answered—

"Nothing for you, Mr. Lautermilk."

Stroupe slunk wearily away. But he did not leave the postoffice. He stood by and watched every caller at the "H to M" window. It was possible, he realized, that Gleason would send a confederate to ask for the package. Stroupe would know that bulky envelop if he saw it. There was a long queue at the window now. Stroupe made quite sure that, from eight till nine, no one was presented with the envelop containing ten thousand dollars.

At nine he took his place at the end of the queue. Slowly he moved forward. At last he was at the window again.

"Mail for J. O. Lautermilk, if you please?"

He watched in anxious suspense as the clerk sorted the "L" bundle. Then his heart almost burst with relief. He saw that which he sought. He saw the fat manila envelop in the clerk's hands, knew it, from the back, by its size and bulge. In a moment more he would have it. Off he would rush to the Prudential Savings Bank, and—

"How do you spell it?" he heard the mail clerk ask him.

"L-A-U-T-E-R-M-I-L-K," spelled Stroupe eagerly.

"Nothing for you, Mr. Lautermilk," said the clerk, and a brawny laborer standing behind Stroupe elbowed him out of the way.

Stroupe stood aside, in growing tumultuous concern. Had he blundered? Had he forgotten the spelling of that name? Had he punched a wrong key on the typewriter? What was wrong? The treasure package was there, for he had seen it with his own eyes.

Hoping against faltering hope, he tried to believe that fault must lie with the mail clerk. It was half past nine now. Stroupe had to be on duty at the Commonwealth National by ten. There was just time for one more try at the window. This time he would not be elbowed out of the way. He would insist that—

But now a bleak blight fell across the path of Toby Stroupe, driving every consideration from his mind except the portent of its intrusion. He had taken his stand at the end of the queue, a queue of a dozen persons waiting for general delivery mail. And squarely in front of Stroupe, in that line, stood Gleason.

"Good morning, Stroupe."

Gleason had turned with a greeting, though giving no inch of his position in line. He was in meticulous attire this morning, in a sharply pressed suiting of stripes, brown derby hat, and was sporting a thin malacca cane. Stroupe gaped at him as at a ghoul. As in a dream he moved forward a step as the queue took up a link of offered slack.

Gleason was grinning. Stroupe's imagination failed him utterly. He could not even think of a reply to Gleason's greeting, much less a challenge to his presence here in this queue. Up a step. Another link of slack was taken up by the line of waiters.

On toward the window crawled Stroupe, but always behind the striped back of Gleason. Gleason stood jauntily, twirling his malacca cane.

FINALLY Gleason became first at the window.

"Any mail for J. D. Lauter*mink*?" Stroupe heard him inquire.

A shuffling of letters. Then came a query from the mail clerk—

"How do you spell it, please?"

"J. D," said Gleason, and then spelled distinctly, "L-A-U-T-E-R-M-I-N-K."

"Here you are, Mr. Lautermink. Next, please," said the clerk.

And Stroupe saw that Gleason was making off with the package of ten thousand dollars. Stroupe sprang from the line, no longer interested in his own turn, and caught Gleason by the arm.

He clung there piteously as Gleason made his way to the street.

"But listen, you can't do that," wailed Stroupe. "Why, that money belongs to me."

Gleason, still grinning, seemed not to have heard him. He came to a halt just outside the postoffice door, beside a large trash can.

"Wonder what I drew this morning," Gleason was saying. "Hope it's cherries. Hope some rich uncle died and left me a wad of cherries. Let's see."

Before Stroupe's haggard eyes he tore the envelop open. He drew therefrom a hundred hundred-dollar bills.

"By Golly, it *is* cherries," crowed Gleason, stowing the money into his pockets.

As he did so his hand came in contact with another envelop, of equal style and size. He unfolded it. It was empty, but it was stamped and addressed. Stroupe, crowding in, read the address:

J. O. LAUTERMILK
CARE GENERAL DELIVERY
KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI.

And as Gleason tore both envelops into bits and strewed the bits into the trash can, Stroupe understood everything. The night before last, Gleason, on his first trip to the coat rack, had peeked at the inscription on the envelop in Stroupe's pocket. On his second trip, five minutes later, he had substituted another envelop with an address in which only two letters were changed.

Gleason now started off southward along Walnut Street. Stroupe kept by him, clinging desperately to his arm.

"You can't do that, Gleason," he whined. "That money belongs to me."

"Belongs to you?" echoed Gleason with affected innocence. "Are you dippy, Stroupe? Why, if I had your money in my pocket, you'd call this cop here and have me pinched. Wouldn't you?"

They were in fact passing a police officer at the moment. Should Stroupe accost him? He did not dare. Actually it was Gleason who accosted the policeman.

"Can you direct me to the Commonwealth National?" asked Gleason.

"At the next corner, mister," informed the officer.

"Thanks," acknowledged Gleason, moving on.

Stroupe followed, his mind in a maze of miserable wonderings.

They came to the portal of the Commonwealth National Bank. A tower clock, nearby, struck ten. Stroupe was due to report to his post of duty. Yet he was loath to leave Gleason.

He did not have to. Gleason himself, twirling his cane, turned into Stroupe's own bank. Stroupe followed, shocked and confounded. He saw Gleason go directly to the rail and accost that particular vice-president who was in charge of new accounts.

Stroupe lingered at the nearest check counter. He saw the vice-president shaking hands with Gleason, heard him say:

"Why, yes, we're always glad to get new accounts, especially when they start with ten thousand dollars. Just sign this card, please."

After Gleason had signed a card, the vice-president personally conducted him to a teller's window and introduced him. Stroupe saw Gleason push ten thousand dollars through the wicker and receive a passbook.

It was all like a horrible nightmare to Stroupe. He rushed after Gleason as Gleason would have left the bank.

"My God!" he wailed. "You can't get away with a crime like this. You—"

"Crime!" echoed Gleason with his tongue in his cheek. "What crime?"

"Robbing a bank," whispered Stroupe hoarsely. "You—"

"Robbing a bank?" parried Gleason, making a lopsided trapezoid of his lips, quite closing one eye and cocking the other. "Say, I didn't rob a bank. I brought ten grand *to* a bank. That's all."

"But using the mails to defraud," began Stroupe despairingly. "You—"

"You make me laugh," interrupted Gleason. "Listen. My old man was named Lautermink, and my mother called

me James. Make a crime out of that, Stroupe. It ain't even one of these here perfect crimes. Because this'n' was so perfect it wasn't even a crime. So long, Stroupe."

And, slapping his malacca cane against the crease of his trousers leg, the latest depositor sallied forth from the Commonwealth National Bank.

Stroupe retired to the bench in the rear where he was wont to rest between his errands of trust. From one pocket he took his Prudential savings passbook. The total now, he saw with tortured eyes, was only $162.50. From another pocket he took a tiny brass key, the key to the black bag, the key he never should have had, but had had to this present inglorious end.

The bank porter shuffled up.

"Mistuh Stroupe," he informed, "Mistuh Billings wants for you to shag a delivery over to the Kaw Valley Trust."

Stroupe sat there a moment with his chin on his breast, weighing in one hand the key of gold, in the other the key of brass. With a jerk of disgust he threw the brass key out the alley window, replacing the savings passbook within his vest pocket.

"Coming up, Mr. Billings," he called as he went forward to take the black bag.

Not for an hour or a day, but for the rest of his life, Stroupe held it.

By the author of "Ironfist" and "A Light for his Pipe"

HARDCASE HARRIS

By W. TOWNEND

MR. SUMMERS, the chief officer of the big *Coast of Cornwall*, lying in King George V Dock, London, lighted his pipe and waved the match slowly to and fro until the flame was extinguished.

"And that's going to sea," he said.

"And his wife?" I asked.

"Oh, she got over it—quickly!"

"Too quickly," said Mr. MacPherson, the Scots chief engineer. "That's the whole p'int of the yarn Mr. Summers has been tellin' ye." He added in a reflective tone of voice, "It was his brother, Mike, that Hop Along Hennessy saved frae the sharks."

Mr. Summers nodded.

"Being Hop Along Hennessy, he had to. He couldn't help it."

"Whereaboots is that wild Irishman noo?" said Mr. MacPherson.

"He's second officer of the *Coast of Devon*," said Mr. Summers. "He's going ahead fast, that lad."

"Could ye keep him back?" said Mr. MacPherson. "When he came to us frae that tramp firm o' his he'd made up his mind to succeed. He'd show us! Aye, an' he did."

"Hardcase Harris had taught him," said Mr. Summers.

He and Mr. MacPherson chuckled, as though at the memory of some jest, too choice to be spoken of lightly without due consideration.

And then I said—

"Do you mean he came to you people from a tramp steamer?"

"Yes," said Mr. Summers. "He'd served his time in an old Cardiff coal tramp. He was second mate of another tramp when he came to the *Coast of Dorset* as fourth officer."

"It isn't usual," I said.

"No," said Mr. MacPherson. "The firm's particular. It chooses its deck officers wi' one eye to navigation an' seamanship an' another to their knowledge o' the world an' their skill at makin' life pleasant for the first class passengers. Mr. Summers here can talk to a duchess to the manner born, or a leadin' lady of a theatrical company, wi'oot turnin' a hair. It's a gift, ye ken."

"How did this Hop Along Hennessy find life on board a ship like this after a tramp?" I said.

"It suited him fine," said Mr. Summers. "You'd have thought he'd been making voyages in passenger liners all his life. But he didn't hide his upbringing. He never pretended. He seemed, you might say, proud of it."

"Proud o' Hardcase Harris, ye mean," said Mr. MacPherson, puffing at his pipe.

"Exactly," said Mr. Summers. "You've said it, Chief. We heard of Hardcase Harris the first night young Hennessy joined us at Southampton, the day before the passengers came on board. Some one, I forget who, asked him how long he'd been in the company and he laughed and said he'd just arrived; his last ship was a Cardiff tramp.

"Kearney, the third officer, the brother of Pat Kearney, the man I was telling you about just now, raised his eyebrows and smiled in that damn superior way he had and said—

" 'So you're from a tramp, are you, Mr. Hennessy?'

" 'I am,' said Hennessy. He laughed, though he wasn't amused in the least, you could see. 'It's a good training. You learn your job.'

" 'Does that imply that I haven't learned mine,' said Kearney, 'because I've not had the advantages you've had?'

"That was Kearney all over, trailing his jacket, looking for trouble."

Mr. Summers broke off abruptly and smiled to himself.

"He looked doon on engineers as inferior bein's," said Mr. MacPherson dryly.

"Not only engineers, Mac. He looked down on the whole damn crowd of us," said Mr. Summers. "We were nobodies. He belonged to one of the most ancient families in Ireland. He could never forget it. He gave one the impression always of despising himself for having to be a sailor and of despising us because we didn't despise ourselves."

"The only people he'd any use for on board ship were first class passengers," said Mr. MacPherson.

"Some, not all," said Mr. Summers. "What he liked best was titles. Anyway, getting back to that first night at dinner, Kearney seemed to be doing his best to make Hennessy angry. He said, I remember, 'You'll find life in this firm very different from life in a Cardiff tramp. The captain's particular.'

" 'So was my last captain,' said Hennessy. 'You may not believe it, considering his reputation, but he used to forbid us to take a watch unless we wore stiff collars and No. 1's. No going without shaving even on the Western Ocean in winter. He was a stickler for discipline always.'

"And then the chief officer, Johnny

Galpin, said, 'And what was his reputation?'

" 'I don't know whether you've heard of him or not, sir,' said young Hennessy. 'Perhaps you have. He was the famous Israel Harris, of the old *Makanga*. They used to say he was the toughest skipper sailing out of Cardiff. A fighting man. Hardcase Harris, they call him. Perhaps you've heard of him, sir?'

" 'I'm afraid not,' said Johnny Galpin. And Kearney said, 'He must have been worth meeting.'

" 'He was,' said Hennessy, not seeing that Kearney was making fun of him. 'A hard case, but a fine seaman. You had to sail with him, though, to really know him.'

" 'And you're of the opinion, Mr. Hennessy,' Kearney said, 'that your tramp steamer experience under the celebrated Hardcase Harris has given you something we unfortunates haven't got?'

"Hennessy looked uncomfortable.

" 'I hope you don't think I meant that,' he said. 'I'm proud to have sailed with Hardcase Harris. Perhaps I ought not to have mentioned him. Sorry.'

"I stopped him.

" 'Nothing to be sorry for,' I said. 'Hardcase Harris may be all you claim, but you can bet your boots you wouldn't be here on board the *Coast of Dorset* if the firm hadn't been damn sure you knew your job. And don't you pay too much attention to what Mr. Kearney's saying,' I said. 'He's liverish always the night before sailing.' Words to that effect anyway.

"That was our introduction to Hop Along Hennessy. I liked him. He was unaffected, natural, sincere. And I felt that Kearney ought to have been kicked. But that was Kearney all over. Bitter, cynical, morose, you might say, wrapped in himself, and until the time came when he really knew you, hostile. When he thawed you found he wasn't so bad, but some men never got over the shock of the first meeting. You get what I mean, don't you? Anyway, he made himself damn objectionable to Hennessy and put him in his place, as he called it, or in other words he snubbed him whenever he opened his mouth. He kept it up, too, by God! And then, after a week or so, I realized that he really hated young Hennessy like poison. Can you give me the reason now? At the back of everything was—*what?*"

"I don't know," I said. "What?"

"They were Irish," said Mr. Summers. "Both of them. Irish. And there wasn't one damn single thing on which they saw eye to eye. That was the trouble. But which was the Sinn Feiner and which was the Orangeman from Ulster, which was the Cath'lic and which the Protestant, which would say, 'Up the Rebels!' and which, 'To hell with the Pope!' that you must judge for yourself. Not that it matters a damn, of course. But I'll tell you this, putting creed and breed aside, looking at things without prejudice, no one could have had anything against Hop Along Hennessy."

"Except one thing," said Mr. MacPherson. "He talked aboot his experiences wi' Hardcase Harris till he fair drove us distractit. It put us agin him—"

"Until he proved he wasn't romancing, Chief," said Mr. Summers.

"Aye," said Mr. MacPherson gravely, "until he provit he wasna romancin'."

"Did he prove it?" I asked. "How? When?"

"THAT first night," said Mr. Summers. "He and I went ashore together to make inquiries for some baggage of his that had gone astray. I asked would he care for a drink; a glass of ale, a sandwich, a talk. I wanted to get to know him. It was late when we started back to the ship. Some one called out:

" 'Mr. Summers, I want to speak to you.'

"I turned and saw a man I'd had trouble with a couple of voyages before. A surly, insolent, drunken swine we should never have signed on. I said—

" 'Well, what d'you want?'

" 'I want some money,' he said.

" 'I've no money for you,' I said.

" 'I want the price of a bed and a meal,'

he said. 'I'm broke. Hand over sharp!'

"A holdup, of course. And how would it end? I wasn't scared, but he was a scrapper, stronger and tougher than I was, and I'd no particular wish to make the voyage with a couple of black eyes and a busted nose. It doesn't do.

"And then young Hennessy took charge. He said:

" 'Here, you, hop along now!' That's what gave him his name, that habit of his of saying, 'Hop along!' He said, 'Hop along, you! Get out of here, you big stiff!'

"You never saw a man so surprised in your life.

" 'Who the hell are you?' he said, looking young Hennessy up and down. And then he aimed a blow at his head and Hennessy ducked and laid him out—*plunk!* One smack and he crumpled him. And Hennessy said:

" 'You think you're tough. I'm tougher. You're a fighting man; so am I. You can use your fists. I can, too, and my feet as well. I'm tramp trained. Now beat it, or I'll kick you into the dock.'

"The man he'd laid out got up and walked off, whipped. There wasn't a speck of a fight left in him.

" 'Did you learn it,' I said, 'or does it come natural?'

"Hennessy laughed.

" 'That was nothing,' he said. 'Hardcase Harris, my old skipper, taught me the best way to tackle roughnecks like that. It's not hard,' he said, 'if you know the trick.'

"And that, strictly speaking, I suppose, started the legend of Hardcase Harris on board the *Coast of Dorset.*"

"He was mair than a legend," said Mr. MacPherson. "He was the real, genuine article; the hard hitting, two fisted, old time tramp skipper who navigated his ship by rule o' thumb an' force o' character an' the ability to hit quick an' hit often and keep on hittin'. There are no' so many o' the breed left these degenerate days, either. Hop Along Hennessy was an apt pupil."

"You're right, Chief," said Mr. Summers, nodding his head. "But to look at him, you wouldn't have thought it, would you?"

"No, ye wouldna," said Mr. MacPherson. "He was a quiet lad, polite an' deferential to his elders, an' weel spoken."

"But he'd been trained in a hard school," said Mr. Summers, "and just as sail trained men regarded themselves as superior to men who'd been trained in steam, so did Hop Along Hennessy who'd served his time in a tramp firm regard himself as superior to the rest of us who hadn't. I think he liked us, all except Kearney, and he liked the old *Coast of Dorset,* but passengers he'd no use for. And the reason? They didn't have passengers on board tramps. They didn't belong. I don't think he ever spoke to a passenger the whole trip, except one."

"Aye," said Mr. MacPherson. "The young fella we called the duke's cousin."

Mr. Summers grinned.

"That afternoon in Marseilles. You tell, Chief. You were there. I wasn't."

"Aye," said Mr. MacPherson, stroking his lean chin, "I was there. I was second in those days and I'd gone ashore with the chief's permission to do some shoppin'. I ran into young Hennessy, lookin' worried. He said one o' the passengers had got into bad company, and I said that when he'd been goin' to sea as long as I had he'd ken fine that bad company was what passengers delighted in. He said he didna doot it in the least, but would I give him a hand with this particular passenger and help save him? He said if we didna get him away frae where he was, he'd miss his passage, an' if he missed his passage he'd overstay his leave an' there'd be hell to pay when he reached his regiment which was stationed at Poona. He was a captain in the Indian army, ye unnerstaun', an' the cousin of a duke, which didna mean that he had mair sense or mair money than any one else.

"Weel, Hennessy said he'd seen this fella gang into a café in the company of a man he'd had pointed out to him on a previous voyage when he was second mate with Hardcase Harris on board the auld

Makanga, an' this man was one o' the most notorious characters in the port o' Marseilles; a bully an' blackmailer, a thief, a crooked gambler an' so on. Would I come with him? He wanted a witness in case things went wrong. He wanted some one who could say he wasna in the café for his own private enjoyment. I sensed he was serious. I said I'd come.

"The duke's cousin we found sittin' with a flash lookin' young man with a black mustache an' jewelry an' a couple o' flash lookin' young females, drinkin' champagne. An' the duke's cousin was heelin' over. They'd put some dope into his wine an' were waitin' like vultures by a dyin' man till they could despoil the carcass. Hop Along Hennessy didna argue. He took hold o' the man wi' the black mustache an'—havers!—what a mess! Ye wudna see the like of it in five years. When Hop Along Hennessy had finished with him he looked like nothin' on earth. An' the twa girls. They had their hat pins. Like stilettos. Hop Along Hennessy kent his job.

"He slung them the length o' the bar when they tried to stab him. An' then—I may remark that I was carryin' the duke's cousin to the street door—an' then the circus an' Wild West show combined under the same roof. To me the labor, to him the honor an' glory. There maun ha'e been half a dozen cronies o' the man Hop Along had smashed settin' at the other tables. They were oot for blood.

"Hop Along knocked doon three o' them wi' his fists. An' then he got hold of a chair an' cleared the café like—like the Gordon Highlanders clearin' a German trench. Aye, it's a fact. He didna use the chair as a club, ye understand, but as a four-pronged spear, if ye grasp what I mean. He didna hit with it; he thrust.

"When we were once mair on the waterfront, makin' our way back to the ship, supportin' the duke's cousin between us, I said:

" 'That was guid work, boy. Wha was it taught ye the right way to use a chair in a free-for-all?'

" 'Hardcase Harris,' he said. 'I was with him once in Manila when he cleared a barroom the way I did.'

"That's all," said Mr. MacPherson in a reflective tone, lighting his pipe once more. "And a vera interestin' experience it was, too."

MR. SUMMERS nodded and went on with his story.

"After that most of us were ready to recognize that young Hennessy had told us the truth about Captain Israel Harris of the *Makanga* and his fame spread, as far as the Old Man, even."

"Whose fame?" I asked. "Hardcase Harris' or Hop Along Hennessy's?"

"Both," said Mr. MacPherson. "Ye couldna separate them."

"No," said Mr. Summers. "You couldn't. And about the only one of the crowd who wasn't impressed was Kearney. He couldn't see that the reason the boy was everlastingly quoting Hardcase Harris was to prove that the things he did were simply what he'd been taught. Kearney—what shall I say?—boiled. He hated Hennessy. He hated Hardcase Harris. He hated the pair of them. The night of the scrap at Marseilles Mr. MacPherson was telling us of, Kearney said:

" 'Mr. Hennessy, did this Hardcase Harris of yours live with a gun in his hand, or what? How was it his crew didn't throw him over the side and drown him?'

"Hop Along Hennessy looked at Kearney a long time before he answered.

" 'I saw him use an automatic pistol once on board the *Makanga*,' he said. 'Once and once only.'

" 'Killing rats on the poop?' said Kearney.

" 'No,' said Hop Along. 'The Chinese deck hands and firemen mutinied and knocked out the mate and the bosun and the chief engineer, and Hardcase Harris got his gun and drove them into the focsle. One of the crowd shot at him and Hardcase Harris put a bullet into his ankle. And then we navigated the ship

to Singapore, with the hands locked in their quarters, and signaled the police to come out and take them ashore.'

" 'A miracle, wasn't it?' said Kearney.

" 'That's just what Hardcase Harris was,' said Hop Along very seriously. 'A miracle.'

" 'If you ask me what he was,' said Kearney, and he spoke so fiercely that we were all taken aback, 'if you ask me what he was I'd say he was a damned ruffian. He tackled that crowd of unarmed chinks with an automatic! Where's the miracle in that?'

" 'I said,' said Hop Along, 'that one of the chinks had a revolver and shot at him.'

" 'Talk sense,' said Kearney. 'You're trying to make out that Hardcase Harris was a kind of Captain Kettle and all you've succeeded in doing is to prove him a third rate cad and a bully.' He laughed. 'I wish we had him on board the *Coast of Dorset*,' he said. 'I'd like to see him try and tackle those lascars of ours. If Hard Luck Harris, or whatever you call him, behaved as Mr. Hennessy would have us believe he behaved, that man with the broken nose would wipe the deck with him! And serve him damn well right, too.'

"Hop Along Hennessy was rather white in the face and quiet and serious. He didn't say anything more. I felt he was holding himself in and afraid if he didn't he'd paste Kearney one in the jaw. And I thought, though scrapping among officers on board passenger liners isn't exactly encouraged, I thought trouble was coming, and I thought, too, when it did come, by gad, I'd put my money on Hennessy."

"You'd better explain what Kearney meant by what he said about the lascar with the broken nose," said Mr. MacPherson.

"I was coming to that," said Mr. Summers. "There's a general idea that the meekest and mildest human beings under the face of heaven, after the English, are lascars on board ship. They're inoffensive and faithful and hard working and obedient. They worship their officers. They neither drink nor fight nor waste their substance in riotous living. Their needs are few, their virtues many. And if anything goes wrong, if the damn ship goes down, the faithful lascars—God bless 'em—are lined up at attention, models of discipline and bravery, ready and eager to do as they're told, to save the passengers' lives or any one else's life before they think of themselves."

"Aye," said Mr. MacPherson, "like they did in the *Egypt*."

"Some lascars aren't too bad, I'll admit," said Mr. Summers, "but ours happened to be the most poisonous crowd I ever sailed with; insubordinate, inefficient, surly, discontented. And the man with the broken nose was the worst of the whole damn lot. What was it we called him, Chief? MacGluski!"

"Aye, MacGluski. MacGluski the Red."

"MacGluski the Red, of course," said Mr. Summers. "Well, we ran into heavy weather about seventy-odd miles from the Strait of Messina. A howling northeast gale."

"We did that," said Mr. MacPherson. "We rolled."

"Oor rollin' surpassed oor wildest expectations."

"It was bad," said Mr. Summers, "but mind you it wasn't W. N. A, not by a long way."

"The one possible danger," said Mr. MacPherson, "was the island of Salina."

"One of the Lipari Isles," said Mr. Summers. "A lee shore, if anything went wrong."

"An' it did go wrong," said Mr. MacPherson.

Mr. Summers nodded gravely.

"Yes," he said, "it did go wrong. For a time it was touch and go. Things were beginning to carry adrift. We lost a length of rails and some ventilator cowls. Steam pipe casings were twisted. A bridge ladder was washed away. One of the lifeboats was lifted off of its chocks. A boom took charge. Darkness or not, the Old Man decided he'd heave to and

wait till the weather moderated. The right decision, too, though some of the crowd said afterward the risk he was taking wasn't worthwhile. I didn't see it myself. The *Coast of Dorset*, though old, was twin screwed and sound."

"Aye," said Mr. MacPherson, "they dinna build 'em like that these days."

"As we were coming about, we hung. Understand? And then it was too late. We couldn't make it. An extra big sea, the kind the reporters would call a tidal wave—poor dumb creatures!—a hell of a big sea, anyway, caught us as we wallowed. And then—then the two for'ard hatches, No. 1 and No. 2, were stove in."

"Aye, like Sodom an' Gomorrah, the cities o' the plain," said Mr. MacPherson.

"And the passengers," I said. "Were they scared?"

"No," said Mr. Summers. "They weren't. Not particularly. The purser and the chief steward were going around, telling 'em fairy tales and tucking 'em up in their bunks, sort of. Danger! Lord, no! What possible danger could there be in the open sea to a modern steamship, as soundly constructed and as well manned as the *Coast of Dorset*—see the company's folders for further particulars."

"Weel manned is guid!" said Mr. MacPherson.

"Yes," said Mr. Summers, "it is. Now that the damn hatches were stove in, the lascars on whom we depended got panicky. They'd had enough. They'd made up their minds they were going to die and they'd die in their bunks, like gentlemen! They bolted for shelter, *serang* and all. But they're better than white men. Hell, yes! They're cheaper. God bless all shipowners, Jew and Gentile, and make them better boys and may they never lose any of their hard earned money. Amen!"

"Get on with it, Mr. Summers," said Mr. MacPherson.

He looked across at me and winked.

"When once he gets startit on that weel worn topic, there's no holdin' him."

"WELL," said Mr. Summers, "as I said, the for'ard hatches were stove in. We'd old fashioned wooden hatches, covered by tarpaulins, made fast with wedges and cleats and battens. Man's worst and most abominable invention. A death trap. Wooden hatches or how to make money from owning ships! Pamphlet No. 1, not issued by the Board of Trade."

"God bless the Board o' Trade!" said Mr. MacPherson solemnly. "God bless its fatheaded president! Gang on wi' yer story, Mr. Summers. The suspense is weel nigh intolerable."

"The hatches were stove in," said Mr. Summers, "and nothing could save the holds from flooding and the ship from foundering with all hands, unless we could get those damn lascars out of their bunks and on to the fore-deck and make them work. That was a problem easier stated than solved.

"We were trying to pass a lashing across what was left of the tarpaulin on the No. 1 hatch and not succeeding. I was lying flat on my belly on top of the hatch, clinging on by the skin of my teeth, when the big seas came pounding over the weather bulwarks. Hennessy, invisible in that blackness, yelled in my ear:

" 'I'm going to get those swine out on deck, if I have to murder some of 'em. I won't be a minute.'

"He did as he'd said. He brought back every man, both watches, deck hands and firemen, *serang* and all. A bad crowd, but Hop Along Hennessy was too much for them."

Here Mr. Summers broke off and chuckled.

"He did what I couldn't have done or you, Mr. MacPherson, or Kearney, or any one else. He made those lascars more afraid of him than they were of being drowned. He scared them. I think in the end, with all due respect to you, Chief, and the other engineers, in the end it was Hop Along Hennessy saved the ship."

"Aye, I've no doot," said Mr. MacPherson. "When I heard what had been

happenin' on deck I wished we'd had him below wi' us. We had troubles of our ain. The stokehold hands were sair stricken wi' terror."

"I know, Chief," said Mr. Summers. "I know. You had my sympathy then; you have it now. Anyway, we got the hatches battened down at last, and the steering engine—"

"Which all this while," said Mr. MacPherson, "had been revealin' the worst side of a base nature an' had reduced us almost to despair by refusin' to function when maist needit, like the lascars, the steerin' engine responded to reason an' gave no mair trouble—"

"And, humanly speaking," said Mr. Summers, "we were safe. And next day dawned fine and clear, with a blue sky and not much sea running, and the passengers went about saying, 'A terrible storm last night, wasn't there?' And we saying in reply, 'Oh, nonsense. Sailors wouldn't call that anything but a bit of a breeze!' And they believed us!

"By the light of day the lascars looked cowed and frightened. And when Hop Along Hennessy was within reach they kept watching him sideways as if—as if they weren't sure he was human."

"An' that was the explanation," said Mr. MacPherson.

"Not human?" I said.

"Not human," said Mr. Summers firmly. "Exactly. I said to him—

" 'Hop Along, how did you manage to get those swine out on to the foredeck?'

"He laughed and told me. The first man he'd dragged out of his bunk and dumped on to the deck was the man with the broken nose we called MacGluski the Red, and MacGluski screeched and whipped out a knife and stabbed at his heart. He'd have killed him, too, if the point of his knife hadn't snapped on a gunmetal cigaret case Hop Along Hennessy had in his pocket under his oilskins. They thought he'd been saved by a miracle. Understand! 'You can't kill me,' Hop Along said, laying MacGluski out and kicking him in the slats. 'If you want to live, come with me.' They came. A reputation for being immortal isn't to be despised in a pinch.

"That noon the captain said he wanted to see the officers. When we were all assembled he thanked Hop Along Hennessy for what he'd done. He was pleased, he said. The highest possible praise from the Old Man. Hop Along was pleased, too, though he pretended he wasn't. 'That was nothing, sir,' he said. And to us later on he said:

" 'We were with Hardcase Harris once in a gale in the Western Ocean when we were broached-to for fifty-six hours. We had all our lifeboats carried away and we lost our funnel and on top of everything else our steering gear was disabled. The hands refused duty. Hardcase Harris knocked hell out of them, rigged a sea anchor and saved us. When the gale moderated we were able to turn and make for Falmouth. You ought to have seen us.'

"Kearney got up and banged his fist on the table and said:

" 'I can believe a lot, but there's a limit—' "

Mr. MacPherson said here—

"Hennessy was speakin' the truth, though, wasn't he?"

"He was," said Mr. Summers. "When we reached home, I looked up Lloyd's records and found that the *Makanga* had been disabled just as he said and had reached Falmouth without her funnel. Oh, yes, Hop Along Hennessy was speaking the truth. But nothing could have made Kearney believe him.

"Anyway, Hennessy said very politely, 'What do you mean by that, Mr. Kearney?' And Kearney said, 'You know!' And Hennessy said, 'You mean I'm a liar! Is that it?' And Kearney smiled to himself and didn't answer.

"Nobody interfered. We'd learned our lesson. It doesn't do to interfere with the Irish.

" 'To hear you talk like that,' said Hennessy, 'you'd think you belonged to a tramp's focsle, not here. You'd think you were only a roughneck like I am and not—what is it you say you are, Mr. Kearney?

—an aristocrat, the descendant of kings? Kings, by God!' He stuttered a little, young Hennessy did, when he was excited, and he was stuttering now. 'I may be a liar,' he said, 'but I'd rather be that than a man who pretends he is what he isn't!'

"And then—why, then, Kearney flung himself at him and gripped him about the throat and they went to the deck together, crash!

" 'ARE YOU implying I'm not a gentleman?' said Kearney between his teeth. 'Are you?'

"The rest of us pried Kearney off him. Hennessy got to his feet and said:

" 'This is the first time in my life I've ever taken a blow from any one. I can't hit you, Kearney, and you know the reason.'

" 'Because I'm your senior,' said Kearney, 'you think that you mustn't hit me.' He laughed. 'Hit me,' he said.

" 'It's not that,' said Hop Along. 'It's because I know damn well if I hit you I'd just about kill you, and you know it, too, and that's one more thing that I learned from Hardcase Harris, never to hit a man who isn't as strong as I am, or as tough.'

"The two of them stood glaring at each other in the mess room like a couple of surly, angry dogs: enemies; the same race, but different; the one dark, red cheeked; the other pale, freckled and sandy. Kearney said:

" 'Did your wonderful Hardcase Harris teach you anything else?' And Hennessy said:

" 'He did. He was the only teacher I had. He looked after me. He brought me up. He gave me my chance. I'd no father or mother. He wouldn't let me stay in the tramp trade. Do you understand? He was tough; he had to be. He was hard; he had to be. And underneath he was the finest man God ever made and you—you stand there and dare cast stones at him."

"Kearney went out, then, looking rather sick."

"Jealousy," said Mr. MacPherson. "Jealousy. The twa races. I'm Scots, thank God! The Irish! Man, man! Glasgow, my native city, is a suburb of Dublin. Go there and see for yourself. In the next war, where's the Highland Light Infantry to come frae, eh? Carry on, Mr. Summers. You ken mair than I do, but you're leavin' bits oot."

"I wouldn't leave this bit that's comin now out, anyway," said Mr. Summers.

"The last scene o' the drama," said Mr. MacPherson.

"The last scene but one," said Mr. Summers. "Lifeboat drill."

"Ah!" said Mr. MacPherson. "Frae the sublime to the ridiculous."

"Ever seen lifeboat drill at sea?" demanded Mr. Summers.

I shook my head.

"It's worth seeing. It's instructive. It's pathetic. It's one of those performances that ought to take place out of sight of the passengers, or they may get to asking themselves questions, such as if this is what happens in daylight in a smooth sea, what the devil is going to happen at dead of night, in a howling gale when the ship's heeling over at an angle of forty-five and half the boats are out of action because of the list, and so on.

Anyway, one afternoon in the Red Sea the Old Man, having in mind the way the lascars had panicked in that blow we'd had off the Lipari Isles, thought, bless him, it would be a good plan to have lifeboat drill. Though what good he thought it would do, heaven knows.

"Being busy with my own boat, I didn't see what had gone wrong until I heard screams and saw Hop Along Hennessy dive. It was one of those things that you can't account for. The after fall of Kearney's boat gave way just as Kearney was stepping in. Kearney and the five lascars who were already in the boat were thrown into the sea, from the level of the boat deck, forty feet up. The lifeboat fell, too. The falls snapped like —like twigs. The miracle was none of the lascars were killed. They clambered

into the lifeboat and yelled. But Kearney had vanished and Hennessy had dived in after him and the Old Man stopped the ship and put the helm hard a-port and whereas before the accident there hadn't been a shark in sight, now the surface of the sea was broken by dark triangular fins in all directions, converging on the one point. And if we hadn't spotted where Kearney and Hennessy were those fins would have guided us. Hennessy had got him, of course.

"I was in charge of the lifeboat that was lowered to go after them and pick them up. The stroke oar was MacGluski the Red, the lascar with the broken nose. I thought he wasn't pulling his weight. I remembered the gun metal cigaret case and I said, 'You no killee Mr. Hennessy. Sharks no killee. But you no pullee, me tellee him. He killee you.' Words to that effect. Primitive, eh? Childish? And though I don't think he understood a word I said, he was scared and he pulled.

"When the lifeboat reached them, Hennessy was kicking and shouting to frighten away the sharks. He had one arm through a life buoy and the other around Kearney, who was bleeding like a stuck pig. We dragged them into the boat just in time. Hennessy, apparently quite unconcerned, Kearney unconscious. I said, 'Well, Hop Along, what about it?'

" 'What about what?' he said.

" 'Hardcase Harris couldn't have matched that, could he?' I said.

" 'Oh, I don't know,' he said. 'He taught me all about sharks and how to frighten 'em, anyway.'

"When we came alongside the *Coast of Dorset* the passengers were lining the rails and cheering like mad and Hop Along Hennessy went quite red in the face and he said:

" 'What do they want to make all that damn noise for?' He didn't like it. 'I hate a fuss,' he said.

"What's more, he meant it. He'd saved Kearney, a man he'd good reason to dislike, from about thirty ravening sharks. He was living up to the ideal he'd been taught on board that tough, hard case tramp, the *Makanga*, under Captain Israel Harris, a two-fisted, hard swearing, hard living skipper. But he hated a fuss. And the queerest part of the whole business was that after he got back safely to the *Coast of Dorset* he dropped Hardcase Harris out of his conversation. He never mentioned his name again until—until the last night on board."

"Why?" I asked.

"I don't know," said Mr. Summers.

"He spoke of him after he saved MacGluski the Red," said Mr. MacPherson. "Kearney wasn't the only one he saved."

"That's so," said Mr. Summers. "He wasn't content with having saved Kearney, he saved MacGluski as well. And if you think I'm stretching it, I'm not. I'm telling the story of Hop Along Hennessy's voyage in the *Coast of Dorset* just as it came about. He was, if you can call it that, an oddity, a *lapsus naturae*, which is Latin and means a freak, something out of the ordinary."

"ONE SECOND," I said. "Were Hennessy and Kearney more friendly now?"

"No," said Mr. Summers, "they weren't. You'd have thought after Hennessy had risked his life dragging Kearney out of the water he'd have taken some interest in him, wouldn't you? He didn't. He never inquired how he was; he never visited him in the sick bay; he ignored him as completely as he ignored MacGluski. Kearney didn't like it. It was bad enough to be saved by Hennessy, but to be ignored—that was hell!

"Anyway, leaving all that aside, the day before we made Bombay, the lascar with the broken nose, MacGluski the Red, was sent down into the forepeak to get something, oakum, canvas, a drum of oil, stores of some kind, anyway. He didn't come up. Another lascar was sent after him. He'd no sooner climbed down the ladder than he was up again, choking. He said he couldn't breathe. Understand? The forepeak was full of gas. Mac-

Gluski the Red was down there, unconscious, perhaps dead. Who'd get him? Nobody'd get him. None of the other lascars, anyway. And so, remembering no doubt what Hardcase Harris would have done, Hop Along Hennessy shinned down the ladder, with a wet towel tied about his mouth and nostrils, and got MacGluski. He dragged him as far as the foot of the ladder, tied a rope about him, shouted to heave away, and then when the lascar was safe, went under himself. We got him up the ladder, somehow—"

"You did, you mean," said Mr. MacPherson. "But get on with it. Dinna waste time in futile argument."

Mr. Summers' countenance did not change. He continued.

"We got him up the ladder," he said, "between us. He was bad. It was touch and go. We thought he'd peg out. But he didn't."

"When I saw him that night he was conscious but weak. The doctor was with him. I asked how he was. He opened his eyes and he said:

" 'Once in San Francisco the *Makanga* had been fumigated with hydrocyanic acid and the seals broken too soon. Four of the hands and the bosun went down into the No. 2 hold and were gassed. Hardcase Harris went down after them without a gas mask and saved them. They'd have died but for him. He was a real hard case, wasn't he?'

" 'It strikes me,' I said, 'you're a bit of a hard case yourself.' The boy grinned. You couldn't have paid him a higher compliment.

"Next day we reached Bombay and they rushed him to hospital. I've not seen him since. I'll meet him some day, of course. Soon, I hope. I've one or two things I want to ask him. He went home in the *Coast of Somerset*, Fourth. He was Third two voyages after, and now, as I was saying, he's second officer on board the *Coast of Devon*."

"What did Kearney say when he left?" I asked.

"Kearney said he was sorry. He took back anything he might have said against Hardcase Harris. He asked Hop Along's pardon. And Hop Along said he wasn't to mention it. He could understand Kearney's not believing in Hardcase Harris because he'd never seen him and didn't know him. And Kearney said he did believe in him, because he'd been privileged to know *him*, Hop Along Hennessy, who was, he said, a very brave man and an Irishman, like himself, although there wasn't, he said, a single damn thing they saw eye to eye on. And then they took Hop Along away on a stretcher, and as I say we never saw him again."

"And is that all?" I asked.

Mr. MacPherson, who had been listening with a curious smile on his lean, leathery face, uttered a short laugh.

"No," he said, "it isna all. The best part o' the story's to come. The crux, ye might call it."

"Or the anticlimax," said Mr. Summers. "The part that doesn't fit in, the part that makes what I've told you nonsensical."

"It ended in Calcutta," said Mr. MacPherson, "a couple o' days after we reached port."

"Yes," said Mr. Summers, "in Calcutta."

"The *Makanga* arrived frae Durban," said Mr. MacPherson. "Hop Along Hennessy's auld ship, Captain Israel Harris in command."

"We saw the *Makanga*," said Mr. Summers, "and Mr. MacPherson and I made up our minds to go on board that evening and see Captain Harris for ourselves. We wanted to tell him about Hop Along Hennessy. He'd be proud of him, we were sure."

"KEARNEY came too," said Mr. MacPherson.

"Yes, Kearney came too," said Mr. Summers. "We went on board, the three of us, and we stood on the *Makanga's* bridge deck by the saloon deck house, looking about us like —like lost souls. And the thought came

to me then that what the *Makanga* looked like more than anything else was a back yard in a slum, the kind of back yard that you could see on the old Blackwall railway between West India Dock and Shadwell. There was rust everywhere, and dirt, and piles of ashes, and garbage, and coal dust, and a smell of bilges and fish—though why fish I couldn't tell you.

"There was no one in sight, but a couple of mild looking, elderly, stoutish men in their shirt sleeves and soiled white trousers and no collars. One was scrubbing a pair of duck trousers on the bunker hatch and wore a wide brimmed straw hat and spectacles; the other sat on the hatch and smoked a filthy clay pipe and from time to time spat copiously on the deck. Both were red in the face and unshaven and hot. Neither saw us. Their minds were fully occupied by the pair of trousers. Would the stains of tar on the knees and seat come out or wouldn't they? They argued the point.

"And then I spoke. I said, 'Is Captain Israel Harris on board?' They turned and looked at us. The man who was scrubbing the trousers said, ''Ullo!' And the man who was smoking the pipe said, ''Ullo!' too. 'Might we have a talk with Captain Harris?' I said. 'I'm afraid you can't,' said the man with the pipe. 'It ain't possible. 'E's busy.'

"'Ah,' said the other old chap, ''e always is busy.' And neither he nor the man with the pipe had an *h* between them. 'What is it you want?' they said.

"We told them we'd come on board to see Captain Harris on a personal matter. And then the man with the pipe said, 'I'm the steward. Is it important, or isn't it?' And then I said, 'We want to see Captain Harris about our fourth officer, a Mr. Hennessy.' ''Im what used to be second mate 'ere?' said the stout old man who'd been scrubbing the trousers, and we said it was. ''E ain't in trouble, is he? 'E was a good boy,' he said. 'I wouldn't like to 'ear of 'im being in trouble!'

"And so, as he seemed concerned, we told him in as few words as possible about Hop Along Hennessy, how he'd laid out the deadbeat at Southampton, how he'd saved the duke's cousin in Marseilles, how he'd got the lascars out on to the fore-deck and saved the ship, how he'd saved the third officer from drowning, and how he'd saved MacGluski from being gassed, and how he owed everything to Captain Harris whom he called Hardcase Harris and regarded as the toughest fighting man going to sea and the finest character he'd ever known and his best friend.

"After that the two fat, elderly men looked at each other a long time and said nothing. And then the man who'd been scrubbing the trousers said:

" 'Well, I'm jiggered. 'Ardcase 'Arris, eh! What the 'ell's the boy getting at?'

"And the man with the pipe, the steward, said:

" 'Captain 'Arris ain't never 'ad a fight in his blooming life. This is a respectable, quiet ship.'

" 'We don't hold with fighting or that kind of thing,' said the man who was scrubbing the trousers. 'I don't understand what it's all about.' And then he said, 'And now if you'll excuse me, gents, I'll be getting on with my job. I got to wear these here pants tomorrer.'

" 'But,' I said, 'can't we see Captain Harris? Surely he's not busy this time of day?'

"And then the man with the pipe, the steward, said:

" 'E is busy, a-washin' his spare pair o' trousers,' and the other old chap sighed and put down his scrubbing brush and took off his spectacles.

" 'If you want to see 'im,' he said, 'you're a-seein' him now. I'm Captain Israel 'Arris, though what young 'Ennessy means by calling me names, 'Ardcase and that kind of foolishness, I don't understand.'

"And so this stout, little red faced man with the mild, bulging eyes and the bulging stomach and the not too clean shirt was Hardcase Harris! He must have seen that we didn't believe him, for he turned and shouted toward the galley,

'Hey, Billy!' And a man in a dirty white suit of ducks popped his head out of the galley door and shouted, ' 'Ul-*lo!*' just like that.

" 'Billy,' said the old fellow, 'tell these gents who am I!'

"And Billy said, 'Speakin' as a relation, I'd say you was my wife's eldest brother, Ike. Speakin' as a subordinate, you're the skipper, Captain Israel Harris.'

And the mild, fat little man said:

" 'That's right, I'm Captain 'Arris. Billy's my mate.' He waved his hand toward the man on the hatch. 'This is my cousin, Alf. He's been my steward now a matter of fifteen years. And now,' he said, 'seein' you've wasted so much of my valuable time, what say to a drink? I don't 'old with alcohol, but Alf will make us some coffee.'

"But somehow we weren't thirsty. All we wanted was to get back to our own ship. We'd seen Hardcase Harris. We'd seen his ship and his steward and mate. 'And what does it mean?' I said, as we were going on board the *Coast of Dorset.* And Mr. MacPherson, he said, 'What does it mean? Can any one explain why young Hennessy should have told all those lies about Hardcase Harris and the *Makanga*?'

"And than Kearney said, 'They weren't what you'd call lies. Not entirely.'

" 'But that's nonsense,' I said. 'You saw Captain Harris, just as we did. Was he the kind of man to quell mutinies and clear waterfront bars and rescue men from holds filled with gas? Not likely! Why Hop Along Hennessy made a hero of him I can't understand.' 'I can't understand, either,' said Mr. MacPherson.

"And then Kearney looked the pair of us up and down, as though we'd been a couple of children he'd found doing something we shouldn't have done and he said:

" 'You wouldn't understand. You couldn't. But I do. He was ashamed, that's why.'

" 'Ashamed!' I said. 'What of?'

" 'Of himself,' said Kearney. 'Of Captain Harris; of the way that he ran his ship; of the slackness and lack of discipline. Hennessy knew he was no one. He was afraid we'd despise him because he came from a Cardiff tramp. And so, what did he do but pretend the *Makanga* was out of the ordinary, a hard case, tough packet, and that old Israel Harris was out of the ordinary, too—a throwback to the dark ages, a hard case skipper, a fighter and gunman. I didn't understand till I saw him and then in a flash I knew. Everything was made clear.'

" 'But,' I said, 'how do you know you're right?'

" 'Mr. Summers,' said Kearney, 'I'm Irish. It takes an Irishman to understand the Irish. Hop Along Hennessy and I had nothing in common but just the one thing. We're both Irish; we understood each other.'

" 'But why did he risk his life,' I said, 'doing all those things, if Hardcase Harris had never done them?'

" 'That was the reason,' said Kearney. 'He had to prove that the lies he told about Hardcase Harris weren't lies at all, but the truth.'

"And with that," said Mr. Summers, "we had to be satisfied. Hadn't we, Chief?"

"Aye," said Mr. MacPherson, "we had."

"But that's the Irish all the world over," said Mr. Summers. "Incomprehensible."

RIDERS *of the* CANE

By CHARLES A. FREEMAN

"WHITE niggers", they are derisively termed by the office forces of the great sugar *centrals* of the Dominican Republic; these lean, sun bronzed riders whose work as *cultivos*, or cultivators of cane, keep them constantly in the open air for long hours each day.

Living as they do on the outskirts of civilization, and supervising the toil of the yellow and brown, these men are usually taciturn and quiet.

The ranks of the *cultivos* and "bull men", as the live stock operatives are known, are filled by riders of many races, all being white. Among them will be found Americans, Danes, Germans, Swiss, native Dominicans, Porto Ricans, and a large preponderance of white British West Indians. Their work is to cultivate cane, clear away forests, supervise the housing of the laborers in village groups called "bateys", and to attend to the harvesting during the time of the *zafra*.

Each man has from one to three districts to supervise, and rides down from two to three horses a day. All speak Spanish, and many understand the Hatian patois spoken by the blacks from across the border, who compose the main body of the laborers.

They ride in stock saddles of American make, and sit their horses with the seats used in their native lands. By these seats their nationality may be determined by those who know the sugar lands.

Behind each of these *cultivos* is a history, if one could know it. Among them are soldiers of fortune, professional men, planters from the Gulf States and from other sugar districts and, of course, the typical tropical tramp. In dress they are all alike, wide Stetsons predominating in head gear.

The amusements of these silent riders are few. Seldom do they meet their own kind except during the *tiempo muerto*, or dead season, just before the harvest. Then they come into Santo Domingo City or other large towns and enjoy a few days and nights of wassail. When broke they drift back to the job, or else seek another elsewhere.

Unlike the *centrals* in the Philippines where no one pays attention to the affairs of others, and the presence of a native woman is unnoticed in the quarters of the field supervisors or mill men, the line of color is strictly drawn in the American companies operating in the Dominican Republic. The men are required to live alone or at clubs maintained by the company at central points, and as few find the clubs congenial, they grudgingly accept the other alternative. Perhaps this accounts for their taciturnity. *Quien sabe?*

The riders of the Dominican sugar lands today are not the gunmen that their predecessors were. Few even possess a revolver, for the country is quiet and peaceful. The rewards are great if a man sticks to it and becomes an asset to the company which employs him. Then in addition to an excellent salary, he is furnished with a well constructed house equipped with electric lights and running water. Vacations every two years are his, with the company paying fares both ways. He can marry and settle down if he wishes to; but very rarely he does. All Latin America beckons. He can ride, speak Spanish, and raise sugar. Yes—the *cultivo* usually moves on.

BEYOND COURAGE

ABOVE him, Lieutenant Fortier saw the robust back of Sergeant Klaus swaying with the efforts of the climb. Behind him, the Legionnaires of his section panted and swore; bushes cracked and stones rolled. The Moroccan sun, already high, beat down upon the slope.

"Getting there, Lieutenant." Klaus had braced his heavy boots solidly before turning to reveal his broad, red face. His eyes were clear, limpid as water spread over blue glass. "Captain means to serve them a dish of their own cooking. You'll see how they like it."

"Ready!"

Klaus resumed the ascent. The lieutenant followed.

He was as tall, as broad shouldered as the big sergeant, but leaner, more finely built. His face was darkly tanned, wrinkles converging to the corners of the gray eyes. He was twenty-six.

The Legionnaires following them were

A Novelette of the French Foreign Legion

By GEORGES SURDEZ

"The crest, Lieutenant," Klaus warned.

He progressed on his stomach, and Fortier slid to his side quickly. A man standing would have been silhouetted against the blue—visible from any angle for miles. Fortier cautioned his men with a gesture, swept the ridge in a swift glance of appraisal. Then he allotted a definite emplacement to each of his four combat groups. Bending low, crawling when necessary for concealment, the Legionnaires filed rapidly to the positions indicated. They did not converse, made no unnecessary sounds.

The canvas jackets were stripped off the automatic rifles, and the weapons, dark metal and oiled steel, were soon ready to fire, propped on the stumpy fore supports, heavy muzzles thrusting into the foliage. Surrounded by their attentive crews, they assumed a definite aspect

of several races, of many types. They ranged from tall, long limbed blonds to the squat, swarthy Mediterraneans. But the majority were composed of the sturdy, dependable German stock, basic element of the foreign regiments of France.

They crept slowly up the slope, which seemed to lead straight into the blazing sky. Out of the short, brownish green grass, boulders and shrubs jutted. Stunted trees grew in widely spaced clusters.

of living individuality, became more than simple killing tools of metal. The big leather pouches were unbuckled, the magazines taken out and laid within easy reach.

"Ready!" Each gun commander signaled in turn.

Fortier nodded. He was satisfied with these men. He had known them two or three days, but five years in the Legion in other parts of North Africa and in Syria had enabled him to distinguish well trained soldiers at a glance.

The lieutenant propped himself on one elbow, parted the leaves screening his face deftly, scanned the country spread below him. The scene emanated rustic peace and contentment. From the purplish, white topped slopes of the Atlas, the lower ranges of hills swept toward his observation post like petrified waves. A streak of silver picked out by the sun was the surface of a mountain brook in a remote valley.

Perhaps a kilometer away reappeared the trail that Fortier had left to climb the hill. The red ribbon curved around the base of the high ground and stretched in the faded green of the grass, with a wooded ridge on the left, immediately below the section commanded by Fortier, and a sharp declivity on the right. The road vanished three kilometers farther as if swallowed by a gap in the hills. Fortier's attention concentrated on that pass. His eyes swept the slopes, thickly wooded, strewn with boulders and cut by the ditches left by many rain storms.

According to reports turned in by emissaries kept by France within the hostile zone, it was at that spot that the attack would be launched upon the supply-convoy bound for Post Walter from Khenifra. If this information were correct, there must be at this moment several hundred riflemen concealed almost within rifle range. Fortier looked for a flash of steel, a suspicious movement. He saw nothing. This meant little. Berbers have a justly deserved reputation for remaining invisible until they choose to be seen.

"The convoy . . ." Klaus whispered.

Red dust whirled up from the path, pounded upward from the hoofs of trotting horses. These riders were *mokhrazenis*, natives of the nearby loyal tribes, who served as scouts. They wore red or blue cloaks and rode perched high on their saddles. The rigid line of a carbine crossed each pommel. The man in the lead was a Frenchman, an officer, easily spotted even at this distance by the glitter of the braid on his *képi;* Lieutenant Gallar, once of the Spahis, now of the Native Affairs.

Fortier watched him with deep admiration, for he was being tested. He knew that an attack was almost certain, was aware that many rifles were slowly converging upon him, yet had to keep up an outward semblance of nonchalance. Two hundred and fifty yards behind the horsemen came the first section of the escort—Legionnaires marching in three files of khaki. A dapper figure strode abreast of the first rank, Sub-Lieutenant Martin.

Then came the first detachment of laden mules, plodding steadily. Fortier saw the arms of the native drivers rise and fall, heard the faint echo of loud voices. On either side of this procession of pack animals marched Legionnaires, rifles ready. In a clear space a combat group of ten followed, then the second detachment of pack mules, also flanked by soldiers.

Between these and the section of Legion in fighting array bringing up the rear, was a rider wearing a flowing white cloak—Captain Prazini, commanding.

A week before Fortier had reported at regimental headquarters at Meknes. He was assigned to Post Walter, Middle Atlas, and had immediately gone to Khenifra, capital of the Zayan district. There he met Captain Prazini, who was taking up a supply convoy, and would remain to enlarge the fortifications with a view to establishing a central post on the site of the smaller blockhouse.

When news had leaked through to the French that the convoy would be attacked, the commanding officer of the re-

gion suggested that Prazini accept reenforcements, in the shape of North African infantrymen. Prazini, an old time Legionnaire, not over friendly with other units, refused, taking the possible result upon his own shoulders. He knew the Chleuhs of old had campaigned against them before the World War when the French first clashed with the mountain tribes. He had kept his plan to himself, however, until that morning, when he called Fortier.

"I have heard of you, Fortier. I know you can be depended upon to act intelligently. Here is the situation: I shall not permit the riders to go by the pass, but have instructed Gallar to nose about on the slopes to force their hand. At the first shot, we shall take the usual measures, the pack mules will fall back a couple of kilometers, under guard of one section. For your part, I assign you to the rear guard. When you arrive at this point—" he indicated a spot on the map—"do not keep behind us, but climb the hill and hold the crest. Meanwhile I will thin out the flankers to form a skeleton section for the rear, enough to deceive those observing us from a distance. Use caution; the Berbers must not learn where you are, must have no idea of your new position. That's understood?"

"I shall do my best, Captain."

"That's all that's needed. You're new here but you know these fellows we're coping with from meeting them in the desert. They are not fighting for the glory of Allah; they want loot. Loot is to be found with the convoy. Their choice of ground is all right. They'll have us between the slope and the declivity. The convoy can not maneuver with ease. They'll do their usual stunt, make a very determined demonstration forward, draw our fire while the larger mass speeds on our left flank, hidden by the bushes and trees, concentrates again and attacks the convoy to the rear of the engaged units. You see your rôle, then."

"I am to enfilade them with my automatics from the crest of the hill just before they launch their attack on the convoy."

"In case they don't bite and fight differently, or fail to attack us at the pass, use your own judgment as to when you rejoin us. I'll watch the crest—and I don't want to see hide nor hair of your men. Everything hinges on that. Have Sergeant Klaus go in the lead. He knows the ground, was there with another column a year ago. Good man, Klaus, even though he's a bit conceited."

FORTIER remembered the words now as he looked at Klaus. He had found him efficient and very likable, a curious blending of almost feminine sensitiveness and brute strength, not so much intelligent as cunning, taught by experience, the best teacher in mountain warfare.

"Gun moved. See it, Lieutenant?"

Far off, a breech block had opened and shut and the slight movement had been telegraphed to them by a sharp flicker. By this time the advance guard was within long rifle shot of the pass. Fortier and his men would not come into play for many minutes after the first discharge, yet the anxiety of approaching action quickened his pulse. His neck throbbed steadily. Below Klaus' big ear he could see a like pulsation. The gun commanders spoke to their men in low tones.

The scouts had arrived at the path and grouped as if for conference. Then upon a signal from Gallar evidently, they separated into two small groups, which in turn strung out into isolated riders to scour the slopes on either side. Fortier could not distinguish them clearly, fingered the field glasses in the case. But the sun spilling on the lenses might be seen and he refrained this natural impulse. The colorful little blotches that were horsemen jerked steadily farther, appeared and vanished through the trees.

Minutes dragged by.

Then a flicker—followed by the far off whack of a Mauser. The riders turned and came tumbling down the slope into the road and back toward the infantry, which was already deploying. The pack

mules had halted, there was a moment of confusion, then the entire convoy started back in good order.

The fusillade swelled, punctuated by the bursts of an automatic from the first section. Fortier sought anxiously for Gallar, breathed easier when he saw the golden gleam of his *képi* in the center of a group. The lieutenant, reputed born lucky, had once again proved the rumor. One of the riders was being taken aside; two men were bending over him. The first blood had been scored by the Chleuhs.

As if by schedule, the combat developed. A handful of Legionnaires were escorting the mules to a place of supposed safety, while the rest of the company sought cover. The hammering of a Hotchkiss machine gun broke out, there were a few grenade explosions. As yet, it was hard to discern whether the captain intended to retreat or force his way through the pass. The last might be unwise, for he had perhaps two hundred men available for fighting, while reports mentioned the probable strength of the enemy as over seven hundred.

"Here they come," said Klaus, to whom Fortier had confided Prazini's plans after the actual movement was under way. "Say, isn't the Old Man a wise guy? Called it right again, this time."

Almost invisible as yet, because their brown garments merged with the soil, groups of natives were sliding along the slope through the trees. They moved with the almost unbelievable swiftness and agility Berbers show in action. In ten, fifteen minutes, they would be in position to attack the convoy. Elsewhere, their comrades were keeping the sections busy, attacking vigorously, darting forward, withdrawing, darting forward again, in swift, deft motions, hard to foresee.

Fortier's glance picked up the gun commanders one by one and he held up his hand to restrain too great enthusiasm. A hasty discharge now would spoil the whole affair for the French. With the hammer back and a nervous finger on the trigger, the accidental shot was a constant danger. Sergeants and corporals evidently sensed this at the same time, for each firer lowered his hand.

These minutes of waiting, with the preliminary thrills of action, were the compensation the men had for their hard training, their many privations.

The first of the Chleuhs reached the point of concentration, splendidly chosen, in a depression whose lip was screened by trees and bushes. Prazini, who knew the lay of the ground, had evidently selected the hiding place of Fortier's men after much consideration, for the massing was under way within five hundred meters; that is within excellent range, where even men less well trained could have little excuse for missing.

More and more mountaineers came, until there were probably three hundred crouching, each with a modern repeating rifle in his hand. In cloth or leather sacks slung around their necks, they carried additional cartridges. Many of them wore a string belt through which a long, naked blade was passed—the clumsy yet magnificently efficient knife of the hillmen.

Fortier took a swift survey of the convoy massed on the road protected by its handful of khaki clad soldiers, and admired Prazini. The captain knew how to gamble. He had accepted the chance of a mistake on Fortier's part as meaning complete debacle. For the Chleuhs, unless checked from the flank, would submerge the defenders with the first rush.

At last, no more men appeared. A half dozen natives crawled toward the road, widely spaced, each one to become a sort of guide post when the attack was started. Aside from these scouts, no one moved below. It was an impressive sight, those crouched, grim men tensing for the fight ahead. Meanwhile, a new detail presented itself. Other mountaineers had formed a thin skirmish line at an angle to the road, to enfilade the sections which they expected to double back upon the convoy at the first sign of an attack.

The leader of the Chleuhs, whether Sidi Moha or another, had foreseen all possibilities, save what Prazini had organized. A single watcher posted on this hill

would have altered the whole engagement. In combat with another tribe of their own breed, the mountaineers would certainly have taken measures of the sort. Against the French led troops, which usually depended, when moving in large bodies, upon airplane reconnoitering, they had thought such precautions foolish.

Fortier signaled the range, allotted the objectives for fire by signs. The firers grasped the protruding grips of their weapons once more. One or two of the purveyors gave final, fond attention to the set of the clips on the breech blocks. The lieutenant knew that the main body of the Chleuhs were covered, and concentrated his attention on the scouts. He must fire at the right moment, just as the enemy received the order to charge.

So completely did the job before him grip his mind that he was not conscious of the heavy firing from the other sectors of the field. He felt alone, coping with the raiders. Small details were etched clearly: a non-commissioned officer with the convoy had gone aside, lifted his hand; a tiny flare showed that he was lighting pipe or cigaret.

One of the Chleuhs who had crawled forward returned toward the main body, halted and started to lift his hand.

Fortier's voice cut out.

"Fire!"

THE FIRE bursts struck short. Dirt spurted under the impacts of the bullets. Then all four guns were on the target.

The blast of lead struck the Chleuhs; their ranks appeared to quiver. For several seconds they seemed rooted to the spot, motionless, uncertain where the danger lay. Then they scattered, many speeding toward the convoy where the Legionnaires and the drivers, made alert by the ripping of shots from above, shot them down one after another.

Targets grew scarcer with each passing second. The mountaineers had recovered from their bewilderment and with their marvelous ability to use cover had literally vanished. The bodies of those struck down in the surprise attack were left scattered where they had dropped, but already men were crawling back to collect ammunition and rifles, expensive commodities in the Middle Atlas.

These searching parties were fired upon by the Legionnaires equipped with ordinary carbines, yet they kept at their task bravely. Answering fire came from various hiding places, the whack of a Mauser or the thud of a more ancient weapon. Lead whined overhead, leaves suddenly parted from a bush with a tearing sound, scattered in the air.

The automatics settled down to adjusted fire, working away in short spasmodic bursts, like the barking of a dog giving tongue at sight of the quarry. The action was nearly over. Before long the enemy would vanish. They had failed in their chief purpose, obtaining booty from the convoy, and they cared little for glory.

Meanwhile, at the scene of the other engagement, near the pass, a section had deployed on a wider front to leave a detachment free. Led by Prazini, fifty or sixty Legionnaires were doubling back toward the convoy. They were met by the fusillade of the protective line thrown on a diagonal from the road to meet just such an emergency. Three or four were left in the red dust; the rest plunged up the embankment into the bushes.

The glassy smashes of hand grenades began. Bayonets glittered. And through the whirling conflict Prazini rose, conspicuous, unafraid.

Stories that Fortier had heard about him everywhere in the Legion seemed proved—steel or lead could not touch him. In full sight, doubtless selected by dozens of snipers, he was untouched while a mule driver had gone down near the convoy, probably hit by a "lost" bullet.

Soon it was evident that the Chleuhs had abandoned all pretense of holding the pass. Their retreat was south by east. The bursts of the automatic nosed around bushes and rocks to find them.

"It's over," Klaus said.

The Legionnaires were in fact advancing up the knolls, cautiously, firing at in-

tervals. Suddenly, the first man stood on the ridge, then disappeared on the other side. Immediately below Fortier's section the last of the native groups had passed by.

"We'll go down now," Fortier announced.

He took the lead. One or two bullets saluted him, droned near his face—the last shots of the engagement. In ten minutes his section had joined the others.

A lean, yellow haired sergeant came to Fortier.

"Nice work, Lieutenant. Thirty-two of them here—Allah knows how many in the bushes. Captain Prazini said for you to join him at the convoy."

Fortier passed through the huddled bodies of his victims. Some one had gathered a bunch of wild flowers and placed them in an outstretched hand. The face was thrown back, grinning through the reddish beard. The poor devil seemed to be offering flowers to the passers-by.

Men were gathering knives and amulets, possessions as sacred to a Berber as a wallet or a watch to a European. The convoy had already started when Fortier reached the road, but his horse had been kept for him by the rear guard.

He mounted and joined Prazini a half mile farther on.

Joachim Prazini was a Corsican, risen from the ranks of the pre-war Legion, formerly with the mounted company of Igli, one of the celebrated types of the corps. He was young, under thirty-five.

His naturally dark, coarse skin had been toughened by years of exposure to sun and wind into a hard, leathery surface. His low forehead sloped toward a thatch of bristling, short cropped hair, wiry, black save for a tinge of gray at the temples. Beneath the long thick mustaches his mouth was firm, the lips full and very red. His chin was held forward by muscular jaws. The head was poised on a powerful neck planted on massive shoulders.

His big torso was tightly held by an old type dark tunic, with the ancient, respectable full loops of gold stripe to mark his rank. He wore light khaki riding breeches, almost white, extremely well tailored, showing off the muscles of the thighs, flaring above the knees. His calves were caught in high boots of soft scarlet leather; the spurs were silvered.

The majestic sweep of the blue lined *burnous* of fine white wool, the dust veil that was wrapped around his braided *képi* and curled about his neck, combined in a whole effect that was theatrical and showed an obvious love for show and color. But the first impression of mediocre intelligence was dispelled when one encountered his glance. The eyes were large, deeply set under strong brows. In the center of a very slender rim of brown, the pupils glistened like coal. There was intelligence, mad courage and immense pride in those eyes.

HE GATHERED the reins in his left hand, brought his handsome Barbe horse about and returned to greet Fortier. The lieutenant, pleased with the success of the undertaking, smiled. But there was no answering flash of teeth, no approval in the captain's voice.

"Well, Fortier?"

"Things went splendidly."

"You're evidently satisfied, pleased with yourself?"

"Yes, Captain."

"There were only thirty-two bodies picked up at the meeting place. You fired too early. With four automatics concentrated on those men, how did any escape? Why didn't you wait until they were all gathered, ready to attack?"

"I did, Captain. Their leader lifted his hand to order them forward—and I opened fire."

"I suppose that can be proved by Sergeant Klaus?"

"If you need proof of my word, it can."

"I hope so. Too late to mend matters now."

"What am I to do, Captain?"

"Assume command of the rear guard, as before."

Prazini wheeled his horse about and was off at a fast clip. He was evidently angry. Fortier tried to understand why, and failed. He could not sincerely believe that automatic fire at five hundred yards should blast every Berber from the face of the earth. And the full score had not been counted. There were undoubtedly as many bodies scattered in the bushes. A twenty per cent. loss—that was not a record to be ashamed of. Fortier's high opinion of Prazini lowered swiftly.

He dismounted, led his horse by the bridle and finally halted near Gallar and his men, who were grouped about some one on the ground. A medical sub-lieutenant was drying his hands on a piece of cloth, smiling.

"Tough lad—he'll be on his feet in six weeks."

The wounded native rider, first man hit in the engagement, was placed on a mule. Gallar spoke with him in Arabic. Then he saw Fortier and came to greet him. Gallar was about Fortier's age, slighter, shorter. He was a handsome man with charming manners. The son of a government official, he had been brought up in Morocco and was, by exception, the right man in the right place.

"Badly hurt, that chap of yours?"

"Through the chest. They're hard to kill. I know of one who covered sixty miles on horseback with two slugs from an old *moukhala* in his bowels."

"The captain bawled me out for having dropped only thirty-two men before they took cover. The wounded must have crawled off."

"Listen, Fortier—" Gallar hesitated, then went on, "I might as well tell you from the start. Never expect to satisfy Prazini. Never expect a word of praise *after* you've done anything. *Before* is another story. He'll kid you to get you to break your neck for him . . . Works once or twice. Are you going on?"

"Waiting for my section to come up."

"I'll wait with you. I've had my fill of being in the lead. I died a thousand deaths on the way up that slope." Gallar took off his *képi*, pushed his fingers through two rents. "Varnished all over with good luck paint, I am. Have you a cigaret—gave my packet to that chap." He struck a match, smoked. "Not sore at me, are you?"

"Why?"

"For criticizing Prazini."

"The devil—no!"

"That's right. You're old enough to distinguish between corps spirit and common sense. There's a dividing line, you know. Young Martin raked me properly for mentioning his idol in a way that was not wholly complimentary."

"Serious youngster, isn't he?"

"Horribly earnest. Not long out of school, dropped here under the orders of the famous Prazini, his loyalty was entire. Verbally, it still is. Privately, I'm not so sure. Prazini has a way of cutting men to the bone with his remarks. When Martin first arrived he gave him a long lecture on the Legion being one large family, where the officer knows his men personally. Three days later he berated him for conversing too long with Klaus.

"The old time non-coms know Prazini and pay no attention to his scolding. The men worship him. He mentions the fact that he can still pack a kit better than any man in the outfit—and so he can. Glad I won't be under his orders at Post Walter. I have independent charge of native affairs there—and don't let him put his nose in my business. Prazini is a hog, that's all. Wants to achieve things himself and blames his subordinates for not making his successes greater."

"Smart man, however."

"Would make an excellent general—but makes a rotten friend."

II

A DETACHMENT of Legion which held Post Walter remained to help in the construction of a larger enclosure. Despite surface grumbling, the men took pride in the tradition of the corps: The Legion makes its own roads, its own buildings.

The site was well chosen; at the top of

a high hill, dropping abruptly facing the dissident zone, it was easy to approach from the French side. Stretches of the trail between Khenifra and the Post were unfinished. Automobiles could not assure regular service. Occasionally a staff officer got through in a light American car, but the ponderous trucks could not. The outpost was linked with Khenifra and other points within French zone by telegraph and wireless, and the isolation was relative.

Fortier, not new to outpost life, fell into the routine without jar. Captain Prazini ate alone in his quarters. Fortier and Martin messed together in a little tin roofed shack flanking their sleeping rooms. Among the Legionnaires they had found a man who had been cook in a former incarnation, and astonishingly enough, performed well enough to back his statements.

Through field glasses, an observer on machine gun bastion No. 1 could discern the first dissident village—long flat topped houses of sun dried bricks. At the foot of the slope toward the north was a last friendly gathering, identical in aspect, but flanked by a reddish fortress of some size, the local *kasbah*. There the Moroccan standard fluttered against the tricolor, for Gallar not only represented France but also the government of the sultan.

Gallar rode up from time to time, reported to Prazini and often remained for the night with the lieutenants. In Martin, Fortier found a satisfying companion. He was young, twenty-two or three, very earnest, with an amusing eagerness to learn. He took his mission in life to heart, was conscious of his duties. For Prazini he voiced admiration, but Fortier could see plainly that his belief in the absolute integrity of the famous chief was shaken. When the regimental order announcing the success at the pass was posted, he read it without comment. It was patent that Prazini had mounted his stunt like a scarf pin. The result was a lyrical citation in approved staff style:

"Order of the Regiment No. 104. Citations: PRAZINI, Joachim Leon—Captain 2nd Foreign —2nd Battalion. Company Commander remarkable for his superb calm and sublime courage under fire, for his ability and initiative . . . defended the convoy trusted to him against overwhelming odds . . .

This citation, listed by letter No. 387-A, carried the attribution of the Colonial War Cross with Silver Star.

Prazini evidently carried his own supply of trinkets. Without visiting the Greek's shop he wore a new white star on the blue and red ribbon of his cross; the eighth. To the congratulations offered by Fortier and Martin he replied:

"You know how it was. It would have been wrong for me to mention any one in particular. Yet, as usual, they concentrated upon one name, mine. Not quite just—but what would you? It's the army's way."

He was satisfied at the way the work was going on at the post. The outer wall was rising swiftly from the ground, the higher structures of the corner bastions taking shape. Fatigue parties, well guarded, led by native agents, sought everywhere for building material. Aside from necessary hardware, the Legion must do with local resources.

Martin organized games and recreations, choirs were formed by Germans and Russians, concerts given at night. Prazini always attended. Aloof and cold with his officers, he showed great kindness to the men. Two sins found no excuse before him: shirking and uncleanliness.

Yet Fortier clashed with him three weeks after arriving.

One night, inspecting the sentries, he crossed the moonlit yard. The unmistakable impact of knuckles upon flesh, low exclamations and moans, attracted his attention. He circled the looming bulk of a supply shed, came into the free area between the wall and the long barracks in which the men were sheltered. There, he halted uncertainly. Order must be maintained, yet there were times when it was unwise to interfere with the men's way of enforcing good behavior.

Then he noted, in an angle of the wall, a confused, whirling group. Half a dozen

Legionnaires in trousers and shirts were watching two men who were fighting. So engrossed were they that Fortier's arrival went unseen.

"Don't, Corporal, you'll kill him—"

"That's what I want to do!"

Fortier rushed forward, pushed his way to the center of the group. A man, standing, was kicking another who had fallen. In the first, Fortier recognized Corporal Gottfried Brenner. The fallen man was a young private, freshly arrived from an Algerian training base.

"What's the trouble?"

"That's none of your business," Brenner said.

"That's the Lieutenant, Brenner," some one warned.

"What do I care? This is a personal question."

"Stop striking that man—I order you," Fortier snapped.

"You order me? Why, you lousy stuffed shirt—smooth beak—I'd like to see you give me an order! Know me? Corporal Brenner, eight years service, who doesn't give a damn for you!"

"You're drunk. Go to the lockup and report to me in the morning."

BRENNER was a large, powerful man, known as a well disciplined, obedient soldier when sober. When drunk there was no reasoning with him. For answer, he swung toward Fortier's face. Fortier stepped back, ordered the men to stay aside. He knew from the louder hum of voices that other men had come out of the sleeping quarters.

"Don't do that," he warned.

"He called me a thief; you back him up—" Brenner rushed forward, head low.

Again Fortier retreated, hesitating. His strict duty was to avoid scandal. However, if he could cope with the corporal himself, it would ultimately turn out better. He had no illusion that Brenner was incapacitated by drink. The corporal was the type that is made stronger, more dangerous until the stupor of absolute drunkeness comes.

"You wish to have it? Have it—" He stepped forward, crashed a heavy blow on Brenner's face, felt the hard skin give way under the impact. The corporal staggered, recovered and came back.

Fortier caught the full smash of the long swing on his left shoulder; his arm grew numb. Brenner was not skilful, but he had immense reserve power and a certain crude science of his own. Even in the uncertain light, the lieutenant could see the blows start, yet they arrived upon him with such whirling speed that he found it difficult to dodge. At last, a short jolt to the jaw dropped Brenner, who sprawled on hands and knees.

"Report at the lockup, Brenner."

Fortier had bent forward, near the corporal. He barely managed to pull his face out of the way to escape the hard driven heels directed toward him, forced upward by all the springy strength of the back resting on the ground. For the first time, personal anger entered in. His calmness left him like a cast off garment. The danger of getting a public beating dwindled in importance.

He turned sidewise to protect his body from a possible kick, and when Brenner rose lashed at him with one hand, then the other. His blows were unscientific, but very efficacious. Brenner reeled backward, on his heels, his hands hanging limply. The lieutenant drove both hands to the unprotected stomach. Brenner fell, writhed about and ended in a spell of violent nausea.

"Over with him, Lieutenant," said Klaus.

He had arrived clad only in trousers. His right hand grasped a carbine by the middle, butt ready.

"What shall we do with him?"

"Lock him up. I must make charges against him."

Klaus reached down, grasped Brenner by the back of the neck and hoisted him to his feet with a single effort. "All right, Lieutenant. The rest of you dismissed."

Fortier was about to leave, to continue his inspection, when he noticed the beaten private staggering to his feet near the wall.

"What's your name?"

"Meweik, Jacob, Lieutenant."

"What was the trouble?"

"Nothing, Lieutenant."

"All right. You were fighting with the corporal over nothing."

"Not fighting, Lieutenant. He was licking me for—"

"For what?"

"Nothing, Lieutenant."

"I'm continuing my inspection, will be back in my quarters in ten minutes. Wait for me there, and you better make up your mind to talk. No one will blame you if you have a just grievance."

Later, Meweik was seated in Fortier's room, telling his troubles. He was a large red faced German boy, not more than seventeen, evidently enlisted because of the craving for adventure. His face was marked, and he felt for tender spots on his body as he talked. The lieutenant had shifted to German, as Meweik was none too fluent in French.

"Brenner comes from the same city as me, Lieutenant. He said he would look after me. I became his orderly and he kept my money. I drew the second instalment of my enlistment bonus in Meknes and turned it over to him. He drank it all up, then wanted me to wash his shirts and do for him for nothing. And when he was drunk, he was awful. He—"

"I understand; go on."

"So he would clout me. I couldn't eat my soup today, I felt so sick. Then he got drunk again tonight and took me outside and started to beat me again. I guess I moaned too loud, for the others came out and tried to stop him."

"Is there any one who knows he took your money? Witnesses?"

"Karl Presler was with me when he took my bonus money, Lieutenant. And the trader—the one near the gate on the right, at Khenifra—knows because he bought a lot of soap and cologne before starting and he made me pay for it right there out of the few francs I had kept. Presler tells me he was tried once but he was let off because of his decorations."

"All right. Now, don't worry, Meweik. Brenner will be tried and punished. But I can't understand why you fellows don't complain. We're here to help you, but we can't see through walls or guess what's happening."

"A Legionnaire never gives away another."

"The man's unfit to be a Legionnaire. Go to bed."

Left alone, Fortier made a report, charged Brenner with drunkeness, abuse of authority, hazing, theft, forgetting professional dignity. Any one of these charges would bring reduction to the ranks; any two would bring a prison term. He might have added insults to a superior in line of duty. But these he considered personal matters, an outgrowth of the others.

Consulting the reports signed by Prazini the next afternoon, he was bewildered to find this marginal note on his report:

Charges dismissed. Court-martial denied. Sanction: Eight days in prison, four of them cell.

HE WAITED in the little room until the captain arrived with his secretary to sign documents. For many minutes there was only the humming of the flies, the scratching of the pen and the slight pounding as the scribe blotted the signatures on the papers which Prazini slid toward him with a flick of the hand.

"Well, Fortier?" the captain asked finally.

"I wish to speak to you alone, Captain."

"Personal matter? Why not come to my quarters?"

"Service matter, Captain."

"Go out and close the door, Sergeant," Prazini ordered.

He waited until the panel closed. Then he reached for a cigaret and lighted it with easy, dainty gestures, very irritating to Fortier.

"I am listening, Lieutenant."

"About Corporal Brenner, Captain."

"I've decided, I believe. You will find a marginal note on your report."

"I have read it. However, I promised

Meweik, the man's victim, my help and protection."

"You exaggerate. You allow sentiments out of place here. Certain things must be condoned. These men are not conscripts. Meweik must learn to take his troubles bravely, to handle them himself."

"He is a boy."

"The doctors accepted him as a man."

"Then—"

"Brenner is punished enough. Moreover, his going down to trial would hurt the reputation of this company. For years I have avoided disciplinary measures outside this company. It's unfortunate, I admit—" Prazini smiled amiably—"but after all, I rule. My mind is absolutely made up. No outside trouble, no airing of dirty linen before court-martials."

"I don't quite understand, Captain."

"For one thing, a court-martial means sending Brenner down to Meknes. Under guard. Sending Meweik or two or three others as witnesses. Sending you, very possibly, to make charges. Six privates, one sergeant and one officer away for several days. Interferes with the routine. Mars the company's record. Let us talk no more about the matter."

"Nevertheless," Fortier said steadily, "I must inform you of my intention. I shall report the affair to the colonel."

"I shall not forward the report, Fortier."

"Then I shall send a report to the ministry of war." Fortier looked swiftly at the captain. "I'm sorry to seem stubborn, I am sorry to remind you also that the forwarding or holding back of a report is not optional. You may comment upon it as you wish, but it must go through."

"You are serious?"

Fortier saw the captain's chin quiver with rage.

"Utterly, Captain."

"You make mountains out of molehills. You are aware it would go against your record if you sent in an unwarranted complaint over my head? A man's career often cracks up that way."

"Investigation alone would show whether it was unwarranted."

"It might appear warranted to those outside the Legion, who judge according to another code. In the old Legion—"

"May I cite a case in 1909? Even in those days, the man—a sergeant, not a corporal—was deprived of rank, sentenced to eight years public works, excluded from the army."

"I pity your inexperience, Fortier—and for the sake of the friendship I bear you, I will prevent you from making a fool of yourself. Brenner shall be sent to trial, at my order. Are you content?"

"Thank you, Captain. I am sorry—"

"That you spoke your mind and stuck to your point?" Prazini laughed and came toward the lieutenant, rested his hand on his shoulder. "That is natural. No grudge, eh?"

"None whatever."

"Sergeant—" Prazini opened the door—"have Brenner brought here immediately." He turned to Fortier. "I'll make it clear to him that it's over."

The captain's plan was evident.

He wished to make it appear to others that sending Brenner down was his own wish.

Brenner was sent down to Meknes.

Fortier felt no regret for what he had done. He had served no personal spite but had acted according to strict regulations and duty. Men such as Brenner were dangerous. Their valor in action too often blinded their chiefs to their shortcomings. Prazini made it a principle to condone the sins of old soldiers. As the veterans controlled the attitude of the company, this made for the leader's popularity and added to his peace of mind. But this can be carried too far—become a source of decay for the Legion as a whole. Men older in the unit than Fortier thought the same, as proved by the many private circulars sent out by colonels.

Hazing and injustice brought discontent and homesickness to the new arrivals. In Meweik's case, ultimately the youth would have been unable to bear his miserable existence, to endure the physical beatings and moral torture inflicted upon him. Three courses would have

been open: desertion, murder or suicide.

Desertion was punished by at least eight years hard labor. Murder ranged from fifteen years to the capital penalty. Even if Meweik were transferred, trouble would recur. Brenner, at his worst in an isolated post, would not be stopped by a warning from Fortier. He would select another victim.

On the other hand, Fortier understood his chief's wish to avoid publicity. No one knew where a scandal would halt, with the opposition press combing court-martials for flaws and seeking to attack officers at any cost. And an officer mentioned unfavorably in the French newspapers was not likely to earn swift promotion.

As for the rank and file, they showed little feeling. Meweik was a new arrival and Brenner had never been popular, even among those who had served a long while.

On the surface, relations between Prazini and his officers remained cordial, but Fortier sensed a definite tension.

III

"KLAUS is not in sight yet," Martin said as Fortier reached the machine gun platform on bastion No. 2. "The other parties are in."

"To be on the safe side, I have a section ready."

"Gallar signaled from the village that there were dissident groups reported to the southwest," Martin went on, "and I'm afraid they'll hook up with Klaus on the way back."

Several detachments had left the outpost that morning, one sent to the quarry near the village, a second to obtain lime. Klaus and sixteen men went for wood, for building use and fuel. The emplacement was several miles away, not visible from the post or from the *kasbah*. There appeared to be no particular reason to fret. The sergeant was unusually careful and had six native riders with him.

On the other hand, Gallar had reported bunches of Chleuhs gathering here and there; he said that the natives had recovered from the defeat at the pass and the leaders dwelt upon revenge in their speeches.

There were almost three hours of daylight left. No shots had been heard. Fortier sat on the parapet, exchanged a few words with Martin. But aside from needless speculation as to Klaus' whereabouts they had little to talk about. In the yard below the section ordered under arms by the lieutenant had formed. The men were smoking, laughing. They patently believed that this would be an unnecessary display.

"D'you hear that?" Martin said suddenly.

"Shots . . . Better call the captain."

The crews of the machine guns scrambled to their places. Fortier dropped into the yard. Prazini came running from his quarters, fastening his tunic. He had been fast asleep, enjoying his post-lunch *siesta*, but the first faint thud had awakened him, although louder and nearer sounds left him undisturbed.

"Section to move down at once," he shouted.

"Ready, Captain."

"Fine."

The gates of the post swung open and Fortier led his detachment out. He had four combat groups, forty-five men, behind him. Rifle shots whacked with increasing frequency, coming nearer and nearer. The automatics mingled in at intervals.

"At the double; keep your mouths shut. . . . One, two, one, two—"

Boots pounded in regular rhythm, and the red trail unwound quickly. The creak of leather, the breathing of men, a certain exhilaration foreboding action that hung in the atmosphere: These were the moments of pleasure, the break in the deadly monotony of the post. Minutes went by. Fortier's eyes swept the slopes constantly.

A native rider came toward him, rifle slung muzzle downward over one shoulder. He was grinning, his bearded face yellowish. He held out one hand, wrapped in

bloody rags. Cartridge pouches and military belt showed him to be a French partisan.

"*Belga—baroud bessif,*" he announced.

"Surprise attack—much fighting," Fortier translated to Sergeant Schultz. "Come on!"

Three hundred yards farther, the returning detachment emerged from the bushy slopes, descending toward the main trail. There were more native riders; a dead man was slung across a saddle. These men were very calm, laughed without making noise. A Legionnaire was perched on top of the load of wood on one of the mules, his limp left leg dripping blood into the dust.

"Where's Klaus?"

"Up slope a bit," replied a Rumanian corporal. "He saw you coming and ordered me to meet you with the wounded and the wood. Would be a shame to have worked for nothing all day. They're still shooting."

"All right, get back. Advance by groups — rifle grenadiers — to my orders!"

He led the way up the slope, pistol in hand. The *voltigeurs* of each group fixed bayonets. The flash of the rifles was visible on the flanks of the nearby hills, but the snipers were exceedingly well hidden. This last demonstration did not last long and silence settled down like a blanket.

"Klaus, Klaus!"

"Here—" The sergeant emerged from between two boulders, waved his carbine over his head. Fortier ran toward him, and pressed his arm in greeting. "Fine mess, Lieutenant—"

"What are you doing here?"

"Thought I better stick here and keep them off until you arrived. Two killed, you know, and didn't want them mutilated. Got the detachment out of range. When they saw they couldn't steal the mules they tried to shoot them down. Can't allow that at four thousand francs per mule, eh?"

"Where are the dead?"

"Out there—" Klaus pointed.

A LEGIONNAIRE, a big, burly fellow, had been shot through the head. The other, a slight dark man, had caught one in the back which had broken the spine.

"Pick them up and let's go back," Fortier said. "It will be unhealthy around here after dark."

The relief section soon caught up with the detachment; the dead were thrown like sacks on pack mules. Klaus was very pale and the sinking sun cast a vague reddish glow on his short cropped blond hair.

"How did it happen?" Fortier asked.

"Took a short cut instead of following the trail. They must have been watching me all day, waiting for me to give them a chance. I suspected nothing, thought I was safe."

"That's usually when you're not."

"I feel badly about those two fellows. Good men, had them a long time. It's partly my fault."

"One always feels that way, Klaus. Come along."

Before them the men progressed quickly.

The hands of the dead men swung back and forth. One pair was coarse, hairy, the other long and slender, although the fingers were calloused and deformed by long contact with rifle and tools. The lieutenant knew both well, had seen them often during the sojourn at Post Walter.

Men must die sometime, somewhere. But few would have predicted that these two would end on the same day in a like fashion, wearing French uniforms. Destiny works strangely. In the Legion there is always an added poignancy to death, a sense of warped existences ending bruskly, of lingering hopes cut short. Klaus probably had identical thoughts, for Fortier saw him look at the dead men and then turn away as if in remorse.

Near the village they met Gallar, riding at the head of the local militia.

"Things have been too quiet not to have something like this occur," he said. "Klaus, do you think I can find bodies on

the slope to identify the guilty tribe?"

"There's one behind the yellow boulders on the right, another fifty yards from the place we were working—unless they've carried them away. The rest, I am not sure of; but those were in line, and I seldom miss."

When the gates had closed behind the detachment, Fortier followed Prazini to the office. He outlined what he had learned. The captained resumed his restless pacing. He referred several times to a map of the sector.

"Why did Klaus take the short cut, Fortier?"

"He was late and feared night would find him on the trail."

"Didn't he know this opened him to attack?"

"Yes. On the other hand he preferred to be attacked in daylight. As it is, night has fallen now, and had he taken the regular path he would be on his way, or attacked, without much chance to save all his mules."

"Why didn't he start back sooner?"

"You personally ordered him to bring a given number of small trunks, Captain. He was unlucky, that is all."

Fortier grew irritated. After all, why did Prazini not wait for Klaus' report, or question the man himself?

"I shall break him for this."

"That would be too bad, Captain. He has been recently naturalized and is due for appointment to St. Maixent for a commission. What happened to him might happen to any one."

"There are two dead."

"Breaking Klaus won't bring them back to life, Captain." Fortier smiled. "I do not believe that he could be broken for this—any court of inquiry would clear him. It would cost him his commission, however. May I beg you, Captain, not to press charges against him?"

"As a personal favor?" Prazini appeared gentler and also smiled.

"If you please to put it that way, Captain."

"He is a friend of yours?"

"I consider him a very efficient sergeant and excellent officer's timber. What happened to him has happened to many others. To be surprised by Chleuhs is not a great sin."

"My young friend—" Prazini came close to Fortier with short mincing steps. He lowered his voice, "My very young friend, Prazini is too old in the game to have his hand forced and not square matters. You threatened to send a report over my head. Those things are paid for. You understand that I am not a Corsican for nothing."

"You allow personal spite to influence you?"

"Just between you and me, I would. I don't like Klaus. He is a conceited Boche. I had not sent a man for trial outside the company for years. You forced me to. Therefore, we shall have two. One plays the perfect officer, the moralist, one beats up tough men, but one is too young to fool Prazini. Come along."

PRAZINI swung the door wide, led the way. Night had fallen, but a vague light lingered. The yard was filled with Legionnaires, for the returning men were waiting for a belated meal, while the others were eager to question them.

"Sergeant Klaus?" Prazini called.

"At the ambulance, with the dead, Captain."

Prazini strode across the yard, Fortier still following. Sergeant Klaus was leaving the building when they reached it. He was bareheaded, and snapped to attention.

"What were you doing in there, Klaus?"

"Attending to my dead, Captain."

"Not afraid to touch them?"

"I am accustomed to death, Captain."

"Your carelessness murdered those men just as much as if you had struck them down with your own hand. Have you no shame?"

"No, Captain," Klaus said slowly. "I risked my head to save theirs."

"There is something beyond courage," Prazini declaimed. He was fond of using that phrase, which recurred in practically

all his orations. "You, a sergeant of Legion, permitted men trusted to your care to be killed uselessly. You disregarded elementary caution. Your crime is too appalling to be paid for—you shall be broken. Upon my conscience, I declare you unfit to wear stripes."

Klaus smiled faintly, tore the gold stripes from his sleeves.

"Here, Captain."

"A report shall go to the colonel. We can not have officers—" Prazini faltered, took the proffered stripes, suddenly threw them back at Klaus. "I wouldn't handle them! You are under rigorous arrest. Go to your quarters."

Klaus walked away, striding firmly, back straight. Fortier stepped after him but Prazini halted him with a gesture.

"I said rigorous arrest. No visitors."

Fortier turned away and went to his own room. Martin joined him.

"What's wrong with Prazini?"

"Getting square for Brenner, that's all."

"But he can't treat Klaus that way! He's counted on that commission. Making plans. He was in to see me last night. Good family, last hope of achievement. Went through the agony of giving up his native land, shifted allegiance, for this — it's unthinkable! Prazini was nagging him about those roof timbers yesterday. That's what delayed him. I'll—"

"You can't do anything. Prazini's within his rights."

An orderly knocked on the door, announced that dinner was ready.

"I'll see the captain tonight," Martin said confidently. "I can get him around. He's sore because he has to report two deaths without something glorious to show for them. Sure, I know. Do you think I'm blind?"

As they were entering the mess room a detonation rang out.

"Klaus—" Fortier exclaimed.

He hurried back, pushed his way through the crowd already in the room which Klaus shared with two other noncoms.

Schultz, his best friend, was standing before the cot, a newspaper clutched in his hand. He explained volubly to Fortier:

"He came back here—and he said Prazini was right, that it was his fault. I said he was crazy, that it would blow over. Then he lay down and said in a funny voice, 'This isn't the first time I'm broken.' I think he had been an officer once in our—in the German army. Then I thought it best to leave him alone and I pretended to read. He fumbled around in his stuff under the cot. I asked what he was doing. 'Getting myself a cigaret; I need one—' Next thing, that gun went off—and look at my shirt."

"My God," Martin said, straightening up. "The man was weeping; he was weeping . . ."

Fortier looked at Klaus.

The sergeant had inserted the muzzle of his big Ruby automatic pistol in his mouth, pressed it against his palate and pulled the trigger. The top of the head was gone, his pillow soaked with blood. But on the flesh of the cheeks, below where the eyes had been, moisture still glistened. For some reason this added infinite pain to the horror, brought a flood of violent emotion. Fortier drew the sheet over the head.

Ordinary rules forgotten in the reaction, men of all ranks had entered. Others waited on the veranda. Many were talking loudly; some were shouting.

"Prazini killed him!"

"Klaus was all right!"

"Where's the slob?"

"Let him show himself!"

Fortier faced the men.

"Who told you to come here? Get out! Sergeants, clear the room; send those men away."

He joined Schultz and the other noncoms, pushed the Legionnaires back. He dreaded a mob movement that might get out of control. He had seen such things happen and they were not pleasant to live through, or look back upon. At last the room was clear. Schultz changed his shirt. Martin wiped his face.

When Fortier went out he found the yard like a madhouse. Men were shouting, voicing open threats. Klaus had been popular and in the captain's unjust accusations each man had felt himself attacked. Fortier attempted to bring back order but he dared not compel too precise obedience at this time. Martin stopped at the mess room for a drink and Fortier was alone when he entered his quarters.

He struck a match, lighted the lantern. He started when he saw Prazini seated on his cot. The Corsican's face was white, his cheeks quivered. Brave as a lion under fire, the antagonism of his own men frightened him.

"I never meant that to happen," he said. "What was the matter with that fool?"

"Despair," Fortier replied laconically.

"I'm going out there—" Prazini tried to find his lost courage. "I'm going out there and face them. I never meant—"

Fortier looked at him coldly.

"I wouldn't suggest doing that."

"You think—they—"

"You know them better than I. Wait until the first excitement is over. That's wisdom."

"They'll forget, soon—" Prazini looked up hopefully. "We're ordered to the Riff —Abd el Krim has started after us, as expected. The Branes and the Tsoul are in full rebellion. Morocco is in flames—they'll forget."

"Possibly."

He waited until the bellowing of the non-coms herding the men back to quarters had ended, and quiet reigned. Danger of violence was over. The company had had its spell of hysteria. In a week Klaus would be a name, a vaguely unpleasant memory, growing dimmer with each new scene, with each new action, to flame up perhaps at an unexpected moment. Prazini was due for trouble.

This was all the more evident when, escorting his chief to his quarters, he noticed that some one had scrawled on his door in big, chalked letters: Murderer.

IV

A STRIDENT whistle . . .

The company ascending the hill halted. Combat groups split as the men sought cover, to return the fire of the Riffi holding the crest. Since dawn the struggle had been waged on this slope, courage matching courage, discipline matching superior numbers. Immediately, from the shallow trenches and rifle pits abandoned by their defenders, now cover for the Legion, from the angles formed by boulders, the snouts of automatics protruded. Sharp and clear, the voices of officers called the range—

"Four hundred—four hundred and fifty—"

Breech locks slid open, the oiled steel within flashed and vanished. In the fast increasing heat, the earth exhaled the stenches of human bodies, the smell of freshly turned soil. The acrid yellow smoke of exploded shells drifted down with the thin, blue haze of burnt powder. Everywhere, the brass of used cartridges glittered.

Fortier crouched behind No. 2 automatic. The detonations echoed painfully in his head. Fatigue had hewn his face with sullen, harsh lines. The four men of the gun crew appeared as weary. He looked at them with surprise; he recalled them at Post Walter—fleshy Germans, with ruddy faces.

Their faces now seemed carved from seasoned wood, balanced on stringy necks. They were bony, ageless beings in tattered khaki garments too large for their frames, with nervous twitchings of maniacs. They had been marching and fighting, fighting and marching, for two weeks, to plug holes in the human dyke that held the flood of the Riff's warriors from the French zone.

From Post Walter to Khenifra, from Khenifra to Meknes, from Meknes to the front, eternally on the move. Casualties and new drafts, men who appeared one morning and were dead by night. The Riff . . .

"Counter-attack; counter-attack—"

The tawny slope above Fortier was strewn with boulders. Men were dashing down between them in groups of six to ten. They were almost without exception mature warriors, bearded, wiry. The sleeveless *jellaba* fluttered as they ran. Their waists were circled by military belts supporting cartridge pouches; they wielded Mausers, all equipment taken from the Spaniards at Anoual and other places.

"Five hundred—four-fifty—four hundred—three-five . . ."

The range decreased with bewildering speed. Fortier adjusted the field glasses, verified the range by the two little human figures etched on the metal for the purpose.

"At three hundred — two fingers' breadth right!"

The corporal firing obeyed mechanically, stretched out his right arm as in training to obtain perfect understanding of the indication. A first clip of twenty-four cartridges rattled through, clattered to the ground, was replaced by a refilled magazine.

"Two-fifty— Grenadiers, attention!"

Bayonets were gleaming right and left, all along the slope. The automatics appeared aware of the pressing need, spat hastily. Groups were caught, whirled, vanished. Fallen dotted the ground. Still the Riffi came on, heedless of hammering machine guns, of automatics, of bursting shells. Success was near and they strove to achieve it.

The company had reached the sector that morning, from the west. They had joined the Freyberg column, caught in a very bad situation, stranded almost entirely in hostile territory by the uprising of tribes in the rear. Colonel Freyberg had suffered a first defeat a day before, had failed to relieve the line of blockhouses along the border. This partial success had brought the still hesitant mountaineers pouring down from their homes, to throw the weight of their numbers against a common foe.

Fortier had always respected Moslems as fighters. But even after five years of Legion he was surprised by the energy shown by the Riffi. To counter-attack under shell fire, against Legionnaires, was the best that could be said for morale. At present, Freyberg was trying to storm this hill, to pivot at its base and gain a clear line of retreat through turbulent territory. Whether led by European adventurers, as some claimed, or merely acting on their own initiative, the Riffi understood his intentions and were working cleverly to halt him.

"Grenadiers!"

Fortier half rose as he called, loosened the pistol in the holster. In another minute the natives would be furling over the French line. No—they were breaking, running back. The officer sheathed the glasses, wiped his eyes and grinned.

"Not bad—not bad," he encouraged the nearest men.

He expected the signal to go forward, but it did not come. Looking back, he saw the *Tirailleurs* winding in the ravine below in column by one, like long, sinuous khaki snakes. These fellows were trying to pass, yet could not as long as the hill above was not cleared of the enemy's snipers. Fortier looked for Captain Prazini, then he saw a sergeant threading his way from boulder to boulder, seeking cover from sharpshooters. He recognized the liaison-sergeant of the major.

"Eh, there, Sulemann?"

The man looked about, caught sight of Fortier and arrived on the run.

"Where's the captain?"

"On the right, somewhere. What have you got?" Fortier took the slip from Sulemann and read:

> "Fourth Company must not go beyond Objective 3. Keep clear of grove."

He returned the paper. "That's for us, all right. You find Captain Prazini."

"All right."

The sergeant bent low, scurried off. A bullet sighed near; others smacked smartly against the pebbles, whined, droned. The Mausers followed the running man eagerly, licking at his feet with tiny leaden tongues.

Sulemann at last circled a boulder, did not emerge again. He had probably located the company commander. Before long, Fortier saw Prazini appear, stand for ten seconds in full sight, beckoning to him. And, without transition, Fortier found himself a mobile target. Then he was protected; his hands clung gratefully to the rough surface of a huge mass of gray stone, flecked by scintillating, dark stars of spread lead.

"Come here, Fortier," Prazini said.

He was seated with his back to the stone, alone. Sulemann had gone to report.

THE CORSICAN had changed considerably. His face was a greenish yellow; the skin was stretched like thin parchment on the big bone frame. His nose seemed larger in his thinned face, beard sprouting from his cheeks. But his eyes still had that disturbing, proud, self-sufficient glare.

"I've an order from the major," he said.

"I read it, Captain."

"Yes—a lot of nonsense. 'Fourth Company must not go beyond Objective 3 . . .' Objective 3 is that very next string of boulders. There's a grove between it and those *metchas* of the village up the slope. No sense in stopping where their riflemen can sneak down and enfilade us at leisure. Truth is, I'm in bad at headquarters. Something of that unfortunate Klaus mess leaked out. They're going to have us reach that grove, then probably send in the other company to go ahead and reap what we've sown. What's your opinion?"

"I have no opinion before a definite order, Captain."

"That's an easy way out. Let's hear what Martin has to say."

The sub-lieutenant arrived. He was unmoved by the work of the morning. In fact Fortier was astonished at the young man's quick grip on the dangerous work set them. Martin was too young to have served in the Great War, and these engagements, compared to the desultory Middle Atlas fighting, must appear to him as major battles. Prazini handed him the slip, and repeated what he had said to Fortier.

"There's little argument, Captain," Martin said frankly. "Major Roussel would not risk a man unless this was important."

"Hell—" Prazini spat in disgust—"some one has to go through that grove to get at the village; any one who gets at the village controls the crest. We're on the spot, and it's our job. This company's under suspicion—I was talked at for hours in Meknes and had this not been a grave emergency, I guess we'd have been split up. They don't trust us, and we must prove to them—"

"My job's to obey, Captain," Fortier said.

"That's what I think also," Martin agreed.

It was true; the company had given signs of unrest ever since the death of Klaus. Prazini had fallen from his pedestal overnight. In Meknes, both Fortier and Martin had been questioned at length by the colonel. Fortier, according to his own code, had kept information harmful to Prazini to himself. Nevertheless, the facts showed the captain in a poor light. There was no reason for his excessive severity to Klaus. The applications for transfer on the part of every noncom had first attracted attention. When a Legion sergeant risks removal to a quiet sector during a campaign, something is wrong.

The company under suspicion, for difficult undertakings other units were chosen. On one occasion they were taken out of line and replaced by naval infantry. This when a hard counter-attack was expected. The superior officers were too experienced not to sense that Prazini's company had lost its spirit, was an aggregation of armed men and no longer a whole.

Prazini's behavior was understandable. He no longer felt firm footing under him, did not himself know how his men would react under pressure. He blustered one moment and coaxed the next. His superb egotism was gone—he even consulted his officers when in action.

"Go back to your posts," Prazini said at last. "We'll reach Objective 3, anyway."

In fifteen minutes Fortier was back behind Automatic No. 2. Again a strident whistle called the men forward. Fortier was ahead in two long strides and, without conscious will, felt the weight of the automatic leap into his hand.

The nearest Riffi appeared. Many ran away. A few came headlong toward the French. Fortier discharged his gun into the first face before him. All around him men were clashing with the natives, point and butt, grenades and fists. Dull smashes thudded, the explosions of the homemade grenades employed by the Riffi, tin cans stuffed with gunpowder and loose hardware.

The advance formed a pattern of combat made up of a multitude of small encounters.

Heroism and sudden cowardice: The same bearded giant, whose shaven skull had gleamed in the sun as he attacked an entire squad single handed, ran suddenly and was bayoneted from behind when he tried to crawl under a boulder.

The discharge of a flintlock pistol burned the front of Fortier's tunic, specked his face with tiny powder marks. Meweik, the meek, nearby, struggled up the slope, sobbing and swearing, kicking at shins, swinging his broken gun by the barrel. His coat was half off; his white face was streaked by blood dripping from a gash on the forehead. He hurled himself at a muscular warrior, bore him down with the violence of the impact and beat his skull in.

The resistance melted and the Mausers, given a free field, crackled. When the objective was attained Fortier lifted the whistle to his lips. At the same time Prazini's signal cut through the tumult.

THE WHOLE line came to a stop; the gun crew converged around the automatics and the hammering resumed. Fortier took stock of the situation; the last rush had stretched the company on a slant with one end resting near the crest to the left and the other facing the grove. The crest was not more than two hundred meters distant, while on the right there was the grove to cross, the village to occupy.

Sergeant Schultz had dropped at his side.

"They're not so tough, Lieutenant; not so tough."

"No, we went through them easily enough that time."

"Here comes the captain."

Prazini was coming toward them. He showed sublime scorn for the Riffi marksmen. In the open spaces between boulders, he neither bent his head nor quickened his stride. A casual observer would have suspected him of seeking death—and Fortier was not far from that belief.

When he reached the shallow depression he did not slide in beside Fortier and Schultz, but squatted on the edge, his sunburned hands hanging loosely between his knees. The right one held a lighted cigaret.

"Better get down, Captain," Fortier suggested.

"Matter of luck. Did you have a look at that grove?"

"I did. Doesn't seem defended. But they probably have trenches and pits halfway."

"You can see the Third Company deploying to come up," Prazini said. "I was right. Some one else will be sent in. Captain Braque will probably get the credit for all this."

"If that grove is occupied," Fortier said, "he can take it all for all I care. If things went wrong, that's a regular trap, Captain."

Schultz laughed gently, yet audibly. Prazini looked toward him and his lips moved. But he thought better of it and spat once more. His free hand caressed his long mustache.

"I don't know," he mused. "I don't know."

Prazini, with his broad back to the bullets, unafraid of death, was trying to make up his mind to overstep strict orders.

Where physical courage was required, one was compelled to admit his extreme worth. There were nearly two hundred Legionnaires on the slope, specialists in bravery, yet not one of them surpassed Prazini. The captain lowered one knee to the ground, to be more at ease.

"Initiative, disobedience, what?" Prazini frowned. "I'll chance it."

He nodded to Fortier and walked away. As before, he stood erect.

"The slobs will miss him," Schultz said, contriving to make his tone speculative as well as hopeful.

Fortier turned, focused the glasses. At the foot of the hill the Third Company of the Legion Battalion was waiting. The lieutenant felt shame that once more the unit might be deprived of honor.

From a distance, the grove appeared to be a most formidable obstacle, for the foliage made a green canopy hinting of dark aisles and thick undergrowth. Nearer, Fortier saw that it was sparsely planted, cut through with ditches and walls of dried stones. Beyond it was the village, the terraced roofs emerging, dotted with the tall white silhouettes of storks. Throughout the battle, even when shells were dropping on the houses, these birds, long accustomed to protection, had stuck near their nests.

The artillery of the Freyberg column, two batteries of 75's beating the open crest, leaped to rain steel on the far slope. A lull had come in the rifle firing. The conflicting forces were like two men drawing breath before locking again. The few shots fired passed high over, addressed to the Third Company, now in full sight, ascending the slope.

Prazini had decided too late; replacements were coming. No—for he appeared suddenly, lifted his hand. Strong and clear, his voice came—

"To the right—*en avant, la Légion!*"

In one bound the Legionnaires were on the fringe of the grove. The natives appeared immediately, opened fire. They literally spouted from the trees. But it was too late to withdraw. The sections cut like chisels into the swarming mass, hollowed room for themselves with the automatics.

Fortier recognized the majority of the warriors before him as Tsouli, men until recently pacified. They had older rifles than the infantrymen encountered near the Riff until now, Chassepots and Gras, with a certain proportion of the long *moukhala* flintlocks, weapons that thundered loudly and seldom did much harm save at very close range. When they came to grips with the first groups, they supplied a new weapon, a sort of hooked blade, a hand scythe.

Knowing that the Third Company was at his back, Prazini was bold, pushed his way farther and farther. In the confusion, he suddenly stood at Fortier's side.

"Tight place. We'll reform at the stone wall ahead. Watch for it."

The rest was a nightmare of confused pictures succeeding one another without transition. The company was cramped on all sides, formed an island of fire in the midst of whirling natives. The automatic riflemen had no time to reload, defended themselves with pistols and carbines. Fortier knew what had occurred, what he should have foreseen. The grove forming a natural shelter, the natives had massed there, to wait for the end of the French charge. This area of quiet had exercised a suction upon the areas beaten by artillery fire. Those who were not assigned posts in the rifle pits or in the village had gathered here.

Unless the Third Company, whose expected arrival had been so unwelcome a few minutes ago, came up soon, the weakened company under Prazini would be cut to pieces. This time initiative had proved evil for the captain.

Something barred the way ahead—the stone wall.

Hugged against it, the sections took breath. Automatics were reloaded. Now a certain number had to face the rear, for the natives had slid in from either side and cut off retreat. They screamed encouragement to each other and many had to be hacked away from the guns.

"Hold on!" Prazini shouted. "The Third is coming!"

At the same moment, a scythe flung from twenty feet away struck Fortier on the cheek. He felt the sun in his eyes; he had lost his *képi*. He rose again, beat off the nearest man with the barrel of his automatic pistol. Schultz freed him and thrust a bayoneted rifle in his hand. The old rule that Moroccans avoid hand to hand fighting with the Legion no longer held. For that matter, since morning nothing had gone as scheduled.

Suddenly Fortier's head hummed, his mouth filled with blood. Something new had happened, a formidable catastrophe. Where the wall had been, five or six feet away, was a hole, and around the rim of that hole were sprawled several bodies, soldiers and mountaineers. An explosion of intense violence threw him down again, and another hole appeared, some distance away. Shells. They fell regularly and the Legionnaires could not dodge them.

The natives had vanished, fleeing toward the village. And the regular dripping of death progressed after them. Schultz shook Fortier and pointed overhead. An airplane was flying low. Fortier tried to think, to give orders, and could not. He sank to the ground.

V

THREE weeks later, he met Gallar under the arched gateway opening into the native quarters of Meknes. He had not seen or heard from the cavalryman since leaving Post Walter. He noted immediately that he was now a captain and wore the tricolor arm band of the staff.

"Congratulations—"

"To you, Fortier. From what I hear, you were lucky."

"Shell splinter through the shoulder." Fortier moved his arm vigorously. "Nothing left. Dropped out from loss of blood, that's all."

"First outing?"

"The only one—I am going back to the company tomorrow."

"Same one?" Gallar asked.

"Same one."

Gallar smiled and dismissed the subject with a gesture.

"I'm alone. Just drove in from Rabat, leaving tomorrow. Let's get bored together. Three cocktails to start with, dinner at the Regence Hotel, and then what amusements this austere city has to offer."

"Not so dull—people are flooding in because of the campaign."

They went into a bar and sipped cocktails through long straws. These brief moment of relaxation, oases of pleasure to look back upon, seemed dull at the time.

"I heard rumors about your show at the Jebel Semiet," Gallar said, "when Prazini overreached himself. However, are you sensitive?"

"No. What do you want to know about it?"

"Exactly how did Prazini, who is all you want to call him save a bad officer, make such a blunder?"

"Thought they were taking his bone away to give it to Braque. He hates Braque—although their careers make them resemble one another like peas. Lost his head—and as a matter of fact, we did not know about the .155's being on the field. There were two batteries, motor driven, and they pounded hell out of the grove and village at nine kilometers. Surprise trick of Colonel Freyberg. Surprise to us, too."

"How many men did you lose?"

"From shell fire? Seventeen."

Gallar whistled.

"Freyberg and the major of Legion dropped in to see me afterwards and took my statement. I heard they had a howling match with Prazini, who squirmed like an imp in holy water trying to clear himself. You know the watchword—no scandal. So Prazini was quietly put out of the Legion and nominated to command a Metropolitan unit."

"Who's your new captain?"

"Not appointed yet. I take charge—we usually work with Braque's outfit, you know. A lot of new men, I hear. Not very

well trained, some of them, but all willing to fight. In any case, I'll see them tomorrow night."

They went to the Regence for dinner. A group of aviators at a nearby table recognized Gallar and invited themselves. Others joined; there were brand new stripes to be baptized. Fortier matched his recent experiences against those of the flyers; the campaign was discussed with the usual pitiless censure of the commanders. The time to finish coffee and a post-meal cigaret and he was dragged into a horse drawn cab. At the Hotel Transatlantique they picked up new friends and formed a procession going back to the native quarter.

"Where are we going?"

"Mother Cartier's."

"Rotten idea."

"Think of something better."

"Nothing better, but it's a rotten idea."

After several minutes of rattling progress through the narrow tortuous streets, they halted before a native house, poured out of the cabs and pounded on the thick door studded with great iron nails. The door opened and, after checking *képis* and cloaks, they filed gravely into a big, softly lighted room, already crowded with officers and prosperous civilians.

On the brilliantly lighted dancing floor two girls clicked castanets in rhythm with the string orchestra. The tobacco smoke was so thick it shrouded the lamps. A greasy Spanish waiter took their order. The aviators, better known than others because Meknes was their base, popular because the prestige of wings had not abated, beckoned to their feminine acquaintances, who dropped their companions immediately.

Fortier danced, laughed, shouted with the rest. Some one had played a siphon on his back, paper streamers were caught in his tunic buttons. Gallar, who danced like a professional, had selected a tall, shapely brunette for a partner. Her hair formed a sort of helmet of tresses, with the sheen of ebony. Her regular features, unsmiling mouth, distinguished her from the others. She seemed more understanding, gentler.

"MEET Maria, queen of hearts," he introduced her to Fortier.

"Queen of spades, Lieutenant, so far as luck's concerned," she said.

"You hold Maria until the next tango," Gallar suggested. "This is going to be a dreamy waltz and needs a stoutish, sentimental blonde."

Maria looked after Gallar with admiration.

"He's an awfully amusing gentleman, isn't he? Better company than the grave digger—Papa Gloom over there—"

Fortier followed her indication, saw a captain in horizon blue of the French Infantry. By the ribbons he was not a new arrival in the colonies. Where had he seen that gaunt, skull-like face? The eyes—He then recognized Prazini, a Prazini with a short clipped mustache, unbelievably aged and thinned.

"Friend of yours?"

"Known him for two weeks. He's a Corsican— Maybe you know him? He was in the Legion and got into trouble."

"Did he tell you?"

"No. A sub-lieutenant. All he does is come here and sit at the table where he is now. Then he orders a bottle of cognac and sips away in little gulps, all night long. Every night he invites me over, buys one bottle of champagne and just has me sit there with him. He says nothing. Then at closing time he hands me twenty francs and goes out. He says: 'Talk to me about anything'—and I do. I feel badly for him. He seems in such trouble. I told him once he shouldn't spend so much each night. Champagne sets you back one hundred and fifty francs a bottle here. He said he had savings, and that he was going back to the front soon, so it didn't matter. If you ask me—" Maria concluded grimly—"he doesn't intend to come back. There he goes, beckoning to me. Do you mind?"

The music stopped and Gallar left his blonde partner. He had seen Prazini.

"What a change in a couple of months!" He tapped Fortier's boot under the table. "He sees you—"

Prazini's brilliant glance had rested on

Fortier casually, then remained upon him lingeringly. Fortier rose and went to him. After all, regardless of the past, Prazini had been his chief.

"Hello, Fortier. Glad to see you better. Have a drink with us?"

"You can go back later," Maria urged. "Come on—"

"Benedictine," Fortier ordered, settling into the chair.

Prazini looked at him intently and the lieutenant saw his hand mechanically touch the collar badge. One did not need to be a mind reader to interpret this unconscious gesture. Fortier wore the grenade of the Legion and Prazini wore it no longer. There was a sense of finality, of extreme despair in the simple movement.

"The company all right—now?" Prazini asked with effort.

"Yes, Captain."

"That is good." Prazini locked his hands before him on the table, looked long at the whitening knuckles. "Glad to hear that."

"Fancy you two knowing each other," Maria said brightly. "I was just telling the lieutenant what good friends we were."

"I beg of you!" Prazini lifted his hand with such weariness that the girl halted short. "Mademoiselle—would you mind—"

"Going?" Maria laughed good naturedly. "Why, no—I have the next tango with Captain Gallar."

"Gallar," Prazini murmured after she was gone. "He is a captain, now. The world moves on and on. Yes, one has illusions. One thinks the world stops turning and it goes on just the same. Fortier!"

"Captain?"

"I heard that Martin was detached to hold the Zergur blockhouse. Is that true?"

"Yes."

"When are you going back?"

"Tomorrow morning; be there by night."

"I was at the staff—to try and get transferred back to the Legion. I can't stand those boy scouts they gave me. Babies. Filled with tales of what the Riffs will do to them. It's ghastly. It seems nothing can be done—now, or later." Prazini smiled grimly. "It's an awful feeling to be thrown out of the Legion, Fortier. I know you don't like me over much, but I know I'm paying. By the way, did you know that the front has been moved back fifteen miles? The Riffs are pushing in toward Taza, to link up with the dissidents there and cut us off from Algeria. And—" Prazini lifted his eyes swiftly— "there was no time to evacuate the blockhouses and blow them up."

"They can hold on several weeks. By that time—"

"They can't hold on long. The Riffs have artillery—Spanish field pieces and deserters to work them."

"So Martin may be lost?"

"And one of our sections—of your sections—with him." Prazini rested his head on his palms. "When bad luck dogs a unit—"

"Something must be done. They can not be left there to die."

"No. They'll probably send relief detachments to help them get out." Prazini laughed. "And I'll be here, pivoting my little guys about. They're pathetic, Fortier. One of them has had his mother write me that he was apt to catch cold if out in the night air!"

"Seriously?"

"Seriously. Now, you'll go back tomorrow—in time. I wonder if you could do me a favor—a great favor—" Prazini faltered, his face grew red, "I know, I refused you a favor—but Lord knows I'm punished enough. Could you—"

"Sorry to disturb you, Captain—" Gallar had appeared suddenly, and rested a hand on Fortier's Shoulder. "But have I your permission to drag your friend away? He's missed at our table."

"No objections at all, Gallar." Prazini half rose, bowed. "Would you care to sit a moment and have a drink with us?"

"A thousand regrets," Gallar protested. "You see where mixing drinks got me. I'm very much afraid to mix tables." He

lighted a cigaret, puffed out tiny jets of smoke. "There are some things beyond courage, you know."

"Beyond courage—ah, yes." Prazini acknowledged the thrust with a nod. "Then accept my congratulations for your new rank, Captain."

"Thanks. Come on, Fortier."

"A moment— About that favor, Captain."

"Won't need it, upon thinking it over."

When they were away Gallar laughed with cruelty around his lips.

"Didn't he cling to you! Thought it about time for you to come up for air."

"He's terribly broken."

"Don't—I'll burst into sobs!" Gallar snapped angrily. "What of Klaus? Of yourself? Or Martin? He sheared us all one after the other. Come on and have a drink. Hell, we're only young once, and not for long."

"Did you know Martin's stranded in the Zergur blockhouse?"

"Known it since five this afternoon. He's not the only one. But if you can tell me how your moping will help him, all right. If not, stay with us." He pointed to the aviators. "They will be over the lines tomorrow. Only the merest luck stands between them and a fall behind. White hot scythes in the eyes, bowels unrolled liked ribbons and rolled on sticks. Then their head promenaded through the hills. And at this time tomorrow night where will you be? Will another take your place with the detachment sent to Zergur? And without modesty, what of myself?"

"That's right—" Fortier poured himself a cup of champagne, tinged it with liquor grasped at random among many bottles. "Here's luck to you—here's luck to us!"

But Gallar's mood had changed. He grew restless, sullen, abrupt in speech. Like a flash the same gloom leaped from man to man, tensed each face. Through the noises of clicking glasses, the laughter of women, the sharp popping of corks, and the jazz strains of the orchestra, the dry crackling spreading over remote hillsides in the darkness seemed to be heard, the cries of men knifed in the night, the impressive flares swinging overhead to illuminate a rush.

"Dirty trade," said one of the aviators.

"Apprentice corpses." The speaker imitated the humming of a motor, then the impact of lead, and gestured wide. "Choice young meat, retail or wholesale. Dirty trade."

"*Zut!*" a slender blonde exclaimed. "They've all turned prophets." She emptied a bottle into the nearest glasses. "Dirty trade! You start and you come back, until one day you don't. So do we—down the line, Casablanca, Fez, Meknes, Tadla—then farther down, Agadir—then Dakar, then the Coast. Takes us a little longer, but we get there just the same! Here's to maggots, rot and perdition!"

"Bright, cheerful, pretty child!"

Every one laughed. The talking resumed. Fortier drank steadily. Beyond the powdered shoulders trimmed with scarlet silk, beyond the bright pupils, reared whitish walls pitted with metal scars. At the loopholes, men he knew, men he had commanded. He could see Martin: *képi* back on his head, tunic unbuttoned at the throat, jovial and yet with an undercurrent of seriousness. He could hear his voice, crisp and calm—

"Schultz, I wouldn't bet thirty-five centimes on our hides . . ."

And the signal lanterns were blinking from hill to hill, back and forth toward the new French lines, with the same chant of need and accepted fate—

"Cartridges for three days—water for one day—no more grenades—no more water . . ."

VI

THE BIG car driven recklessly by the military chauffeur weaved through groups of men, frightened pack camels and brought stentorian comments from mules. In the tawny light of late afternoon, the rows of tents in regular patterns, enclosed in girdles of barbed

wire, flanked by massive tanks, were blurred, less precise, unreal.

Lined on the crest above, field pieces pounded away rhythmically. The men of the gun crews, stripped to the waist, appeared as if their tanned, muscled torsos had been chisled from metal. They worked leisurely. Infantrymen off duty had strolled up to watch the show. Shells sought for concentration points and villages miles away.

The automobile slid into a street of the camp, turned once and stopped before a row of larger tents.

The chauffeur addressed Fortier—

"Legion headquarters, Lieutenant."

Fortier got out of the car, shook hands with the half dozen officers who had come with him from Meknes. Then he hailed a Legionnaire of his company.

"What's that—rifle fire?"

"Yes. The lines are over the crest, four or five hundred meters. Want to see the major? He's in there. Don't worry about your stuff. I'll hand it to your orderly."

In the tent Fortier found Major Roussel seated before a folding table on which a map was spread. The candle in the cage of tin and glass was already burning, casting a yellow circle downward. Roussel lifted his bald head. His clean-shaven face, broad as it was high, split into a smile of genuine welcome. Without rising he extended his hand and asked the usual banal questions. Then:

"Captain Braque will be here soon. As you know, Martin is blocked at Zergur. He's signaled that there's artillery coming toward him and I have authorization to undertake a rescue. I'm not optimistic, but we can't let our men die within eight miles and keep our arms folded. Braque is in charge here."

"I'll be ready to go, Major."

"You were wounded — you're just back."

"Nevertheless, I'd like to go."

"We'll ask. Here's Braque now—"

Braque came in, greeted Fortier, brought a tin trunk nearer without visible effort. He was tall and lean, near forty. His gray eyes were quick, forever darting about, resting on nothing, missing nothing. A long hooked nose jutted above a graying mustache, a humorous smile. His skinny arm shot forward, his fingers closed on a yellow package of cigarets on the table. A match scratched against the heel of his boot.

"What have you got there, Major, a map? For tonight?"

"That's it."

"I've found a native guide, trustworthy."

Fortier addressed Braque:

"Captain, I have a request to make which you'll understand. That's one of our sections stranded with Martin. Don't you think our men should get the choice when you call for volunteers? And that I might go along as your second?"

"Something in that," Braque admitted. "Can you take charge? You're recently out of the hospital."

"I'd be glad to follow you, Captain."

"I'm willing to step aside, Major," Braque said. "I'm not too anxious, knowing there'll be plenty of lead for all of us before this Riff affair is finished." He turned to Fortier. "The major and I have decided to risk sixty men. A quick march there and a quick march back. Sounds easy—were it not for thirty thousand Riffi in the neighborhood."

"Your company should do the stunt," the major agreed. "The men are pretty well shaken up by all that's happened. There was a question of merging it and recomposing the entire outfit. That's bad —leaves a scar on the battalion, like an operation on a human body. Prazini was too proud of it—something was bound to happen. Prazini was a damned good lieutenant, and grew foolish only after he became captain and started to have delusions of grandeur. Common fault among the old-timers.

"I knew him at Ain Saffra, when he was nineteen. Used to hold his sash when he rolled into it—smallest waist and widest shoulder in the company. What spoiled both of us was the war which gave us commissions. We'd have made perfect *adjutants* of the old type, he and I. *Bon dieu*,

we have never loved each other, but we have respected each other, from the days when we pounded the Casa-Fez trail with sergeant's sardines on our arms."

"So it's agreed, Major?" Fortier asked.

"Agreed."

Soon after Fortier had located Sergeant Begues, who was senior non-com, and asked him to order the men out. The company—what was left of it—drew up in two lines. Of one hundred and sixty faces, only half were known to Fortier. The newcomers, freshly arrived from Algeria, Fortier dismissed immediately.

"COMRADES," he addressed the rest, "I am not exposing a secret when I tell you that this company is presumed to be in bad shape. Many unfortunate happenings have brought us to unfavorable attention. A detachment is to be risked in an attempt to save Sub-Lieutenant Martin, Sergeant Schultz, and our other comrades occupying Zergur. I claimed the right to handle this matter ourselves. There are nine chances in ten we will be massacred. So a limit has been set to sixty men. I count over seventy-five present. I know you are all volunteers. Men with sore feet, or otherwise unfit physically, owe it to their companions not to come. There must be some way of choosing, so I shall ask the sergeant to present me a list of the fit, and I shall select those with the best records."

Fortier went to his tent with Sergeant Begues.

"Armament—carbines and as many automatic pistols as you can draw. Two musette bags—one with food for twenty-four hours, one filled with grenades. Two canteens. Take the sergeants' lists as they come in and check the men. We start at eleven. Gather quietly. Understood?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"Four sergeants—you're one of them. Select the other three. No drinking between now and the start. Be pitiless; a man partially drunk is a man out. I want no brandy courage."

Fortier found Braque in his tent and together they worked out a route on the map.

From the information gathered from spies and airplane reports, they knew the principal outposts of the Riffs, the principal camps. The problem was to weave between them to reach the circle of besiegers around Zergur, to break it, to free the small garrison and escape after blowing up the fortifications. Reaching the vicinity of the blockhouse was easy—it might be accomplished without attracting attention. The danger lay afterward.

Braque had sent an orderly for the guide.

A tall native entered, in the khaki uniform and turban of the Moroccan sharpshooters. He saluted the officers, halting eight paces away. Fortier noted the straight, lithe body, the intelligent glance, the grim resolution.

"Corporal Roufil," Braque said. "Roufil, you will go with the lieutenant instead of me. He will trust you as I would. He sees no objection to your wearing garments other than the uniform—and if he fails you can escape."

"No need. I go with the men as one of them. Their quarrel is my quarrel."

"You speak French well, Corporal," Fortier said.

"Fifteen years' service. As a boy I lived here—one of the Tsoul tribal groups. Many times before the French came I crossed into the Riff and returned again with merchandise. Where Zergur is, there was formerly the Thursday market."

Fortier selected a large airplane photograph.

"If one crosses the river near the twin trees, how many trails open, where do they lead?"

"Three trails; one goes north toward the Riff, one follows the river, the third goes on to Zergur. This last passes through a ravine, where men are now camped—so we must seek the left crest, lower and unlikely to be occupied, for one may not see the French lines from there."

"That will do. Report to my tent at ten-thirty." He offered his hand to the

native, who touched it briefly, Arab fashion, saluted and left. "Good man . . ."

"Yes—and hates the Riffi. The son of a Tsouli by a Jewish trader, he suffered considerably the one time he tried to leave the army for civil occupations. They told him he had entered French service to be allowed to wear a red cap instead of the black one."

Fortier went back to his quarters and found Sergeant Begues waiting.

"The sixty men are listed, Lieutenant. Only one in question—Private Meweik. He is a brave lad but there are half a dozen men older in years and with the same replacement draft who wish to go. He said to ask you to decide—that you knew him."

"Put him down. All right, Begues, ten-thirty."

Left alone, Fortier wrote a few letters, to be mailed in the event he did not come back. Sixty men were sixty men—and no match for thousands. From the day he arrived at Khenifra and met Prazini, he had felt that their connection would end in the death of one or the other. This feeling, indefinite at the start, had grown. Prazini, with a home unit in Meknes, was out of danger.

At precisely ten-thirty Begues reported.

"Everybody ready. Food and grenades allotted to each man; one hundred and fifty cartridges apiece. The men are outside. And the guide is there, too."

Fortier tested the laces of his high boots, slipped a woolen tunic without rank marks over his shirt. Instead of the *képi*, a long strip of khaki cloth wound into a turban, four additional pistol magazines in his coat pocket, a bag of food over one shoulder. In another pocket went folded maps, a compass, matches in a safety case, cigarets. A trooper's two quart canteen, filled with water flavored with anisette, was slung over the other shoulder. In his hip pocket a flask of old brandy.

"Ready—"

He looked back at his two tin trunks, bearing his name in white stenciled letters, and wondered whether this were not his last sight of his belongings.

Begues led the way, for the Legionnaires had been sent near the line of shallow trenches.

They were massed in a depression waiting for him. The night was dark; the sky studded with stars seemed to bear down closer than usual.

"Sergeants, count your men. All there? All right!"

A hand on his sleeve. Braque was there.

"Two hours from now the whole battalion will be alerted and moved down to the lines. If you get into trouble near here, within striking distance, send up a rocket."

"All right, Captain."

"Good luck."

Fortier turned a last time, twenty yards farther on. Braque was already lost in the darkness. Cigaret stubs, thrown away at a sergeant's order, curved like scarlet stars and vanished.

VII

SHARP, clear, a boot toe struck a stone.

There was a rattle down the hill, a succession of clicking impacts, a stop, then the dribbling of smaller fragments. Fortier halted, the whole line came to a dead stop. They listened. Then Roufil touched the lieutenant's sleeve, Fortier touched Begues who followed him, and the march was resumed as the signal traveled.

What these men had achieved would have been impossible against well organized foes. But the Riffi's lines were not lines in the accepted sense. There were shallow trenches, rifle pits, with wide, empty spaces between. The principal forces were gathered in camps near water holes. The darkness was complete; the natives dared not light fires because of the watching artillery.

Several times dogs had barked, scenting strangers. But the natives paid little heed to their dogs, for the animals, who considered members of the allied tribes as alien as the French, howled all night. They had forded the river, which raced

knee high on a slippery clay bed. There had been several falls and much splashing, enough to wake the hillsides. But no hail came, no shot was fired.

The feeling of utter security, of absolute confidence in ultimate success, grew stronger. Fortier fought against it, knowing too well this tendency of the mind to acquire peace. There was constant danger of discovery—an unlucky tumble, a butt plate brought down too hard against a stone. Behind him, with the muffled steps of the men, he caught an occasional warning whisper, a low curse.

From the front lines of the French, now several kilometers in the rear, came shots in rapid succession, with the chorus of the automatics. At long intervals, the batteries hurled shells on designated targets in short bursts lasting fifteen to thirty seconds, ever hoping to bring death and confusion into an encampment. The routine of the night was kept according to instruction, for it was feared that the slightest departure from the usual procedure would serve as a warning.

A man slipped. Fortier caught his breath; heard the rustling of his equipment, the scraping of his boots, then the hard breathing of those who held him while he recovered his balance. Silence once again. Fortier, turning, could barely discern the first two men behind him.

After a long space of quiet he grew conscious of a faint, melodious sound, a light hum, very remote. He recognized a familiar Legion song. Glancing at his watch, he saw the luminous hands pointing at two. The Legion battalion was marching down to the lines, singing. Within rifle range, when the battalion reached the open, the singing would cease.

There was a certain measure of comfort in the knowledge that others were thinking of him, of those with him, hoping for them, perhaps praying for their success. He felt less alone. This first elation oozed away swiftly when the singing stopped.

Roufil turned to the right, led the way downhill, brought them into a narrow gully. Above, the sharp edges of the crests on either side, the silhouettes of trees against the sky which appeared suddenly lighter, like silk, seen from the floor of the valley.

"The nearest camp is a full mile away," Roufil explained, almost in a natural voice. "There is no reason for sentries here. What time is it, Lieutenant?"

"2:05—"

"We must hurry if we wish to return before daylight. It will be easier to come back, for I recall the exact path to follow to avoid camps or sentries. If there is anything more to say to your men, Lieutenant, this is the time. Farther on, we can not halt or speak aloud."

"Begues, tell the men to drink now and then leave the canteens alone." Again he went over the instructions already given, and concluded, "Every fourth man will have a grenade in his hand at the word 'grenade' passed from man to man. At the word 'ready' they will prime it. You have the rocket gun?"

"Yes, Lieutenant." Begues guided Fortier's hand to feel the big pistol.

"Have a light flare ready. Shoot it high at the first shot. That will warn Martin that we are near. At the same time it will be seen from the rear and they'll know we've made it. In case you are put out of action, Begues, who will pick up that gun?"

"I have four men told off to watch me."

"Good. Forward."

Roufil went on with less caution. The march grew swifter. The guide was in familiar country, had obtained his bearings, turned left or right without hesitation, found gaps between hills. Twenty minutes after the halt, he reached out, touched Fortier's arm warningly, and then vanished. He came back soon and signaled to walk on. These halts and stops became more frequent. At length he drew near and whispered—

"The blockhouse—up there!"

LOOMING against the sky a hill swept up steeply. Barely discernible on its crest were the crenelated walls of Post Zergur. Fortier wondered why there was no firing, no sign of fighting. Perhaps it

was too late and the blockhouse had been stormed. Then he reasoned that the Riffi, feeling sure that the fortification would fall without loss of life to themselves by use of artillery at almost point-blank range, preferred to rest. Also Martin would wish to save his cartridges as much as possible.

"Grenades," he ordered.

Need for concealment would soon be over. He knew that those following him had the worst part. He had to think, to plan, while all they could do was wait — interminably. The impact of boots on the soil grew louder. The men were crowding forward, eager to act.

"Ready!"

The lines blockading Zergur must be very close, for they were now less than a kilometer from the post. Far on the right, obliviously beyond range of the French batteries, fires gleamed.

"*Men hou?*" the first challenge came, almost a whisper.

"*Ouled Jedda,*" Roufil replied.

Tall and white, a shape detached itself from a patch of darkness. The gleam of starlight on a gun barrel. Then there was a scuffle, the smack of metal on bone. Roufil rose alone. It had happened with breath taking rapidity. Another sentry appeared twenty yards farther on; again the infantryman replied. This time Fortier tore the Mauser from the man's hand when Roufil grasped his throat and smashed the butt on his skull.

"Should double their sentries," Fortier thought.

The third guard, probably warned by some sound which had escaped the European, knew that all was not well. Roufil parleyed with him for a few seconds, but he stepped back whenever the guide approached. Then the guide suddenly leaped forward, brushed aside the rifle, which Fortier caught and clubbed. He located the fallen man's head and brought the butt down like a pile driver.

But Roufil did not rise. And not far away a sleepy voice arose, asking the reason for the disturbance. With discovery a matter of seconds, Fortier bent over the guide to help him up. His wrist encountered the hilt of a knife. The sentry had found time to draw his blade and sink it home.

Twigs were crackling near, and a rifle blazed away within inches of his face. He tore the pistol from its holster, fired twice. The detonation of the rocket pistol thumped behind him, a long streak of light lifted smoothly, soared higher and higher. Then the rocket exploded, flooding its harsh, cruel light over the scene, revealing scattered bushes, rocky soil— and natives running toward them.

Carbines came into action, grenades were flung.

Long howls greeted the attack, guns were fired at random from every side.

"The blockhouse, everybody! This way —this way!"

The non-coms repeated his orders. The rocket had gone out; they were in darkness again, but not the preceding stillness. The entire valley was aflame, the crests of the nearer hills were flickering with rifle fire. But the Riffi were not yet certain what had happened. The general opinion seemed to be that the garrison was attempting an escape, and the majority of the bullets were fired up at the block-house.

The detachment fought its way up the slope toward the walls. Men came upon them from all sides, but the Legionnaires had a certain advantage. The element of surprise was with them and they could strike out with the reasonable certainty that they would hit an enemy. Despite popular belief, the flashes of rifles and pistols make poor illumination, present the pictures for too brief a time.

Fortier, who had to make himself heard to give his men a rallying point, was twice dragged down by groping hands, and struck out with the pistol barrel to free himself. He felt the straps of his bags give way, the cloth of his tunic tear in a dozen places. His knee smarted, gashed deeply by an upward drive of a knife meant to disembowel him. Instinct rather than sight or sound made him bring up his leg to protect his stomach as he clashed with his unseen adversary.

His hand reached out at last and met barbed wires. He followed, calling to his men at the same time. Other voices picked up:

"This way! This way!"

He found a gap in the wire. The voices were straight ahead. He continued to shout and men passed before him. When no more came he followed. The walls of the blockhouse loomed overhead. Now he was under the gate; the big panels swung shut, heavy wooden bars dropped into metal sockets.

"LIEUTENANT Fortier speaking! Who commands here?"

"I do. Thanks for coming," the quiet, well remembered voice of Martin answered. A hand gripped his own.

"Get your men ready—we have to get out."

"All right; my charges are placed, the fuse is ready. I'll get some clothes on."

"Begues, find out the casualties and report to me."

"In the office, next to my room," Martin added.

He led Fortier into a building, scratched a match and lighted a lantern. The lieutenant laughed. Martin was wearing pajamas, his feet were in soft slippers. The sub-lieutenant reached for his clothes, tore off the silken stuff, explaining:

"Didn't expect callers. Usually they leave us alone nights. They soon learned that with the rockets and grenades prowlers didn't last long. I have three men badly wounded—too badly to carry out. Can't leave them here alive. I haven't the heart to shoot them, yet I can't leave them here to be blown up or perhaps live to be tortured. And if burdened by stretchers, we are lost."

"They must be sacrificed. How many men have you left?"

"Twenty-four, including seven wounded able to walk. They had a cannon and knocked a hole here and there. This afternoon they smashed four men. On the whole, poor results. Abd el Krim's cannoneers won't win the show for him—" Martin broke off— "come in."

Sergeant Begues entered.

"Five men missing, Lieutenant, aside from the guide."

"I have given the same instructions to your men about the equipment that I received for mine," Begues added to Martin. "If that's all right, they'll be ready within five minutes."

"Fine."

"And the captain wants to speak to you," Begues concluded.

"What captain?" Fortier asked.

"Well—Prazini. Thought he was still captain, though he doesn't look it."

"You saw him yourself?" Fortier insisted.

"Not five minutes ago."

Fortier looked closer at Begues. He saw bloody smears on his face, evident traces of nervousness in the twitching of the facial muscles, that were perhaps not all due to natural excitement.

"All right, send him here," he said. He waited until the door was closed, then stood up. "I'll go and see that things are done right. Begues' gone crazy. I saw Prazini day before yesterday in Meknes."

A few minutes later, while Martin was collecting his papers, some one knocked at the door which swung open at Martin's invitation.

A Legionnaire entered, closed the door, saluted impeccably. He was a queer looking private who wore officer's laced boots and riding breeches; he was cramped in a tunic several sizes too small, the arms being bare almost to the elbows. He was completely shaven, thin, brown, but undoubtedly—Prazini.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he greeted them. He saluted Fortier specially. "Good evening, *mon Lieutenant!*" He used the private's words in addressing a chief. "I needed no favor from you after all. Prazini's with his men!"

"I see you are, Captain."

"I surrendered the title. I am Prazini, deserter from the Line infantry, amateur Legionnaire. I thought, perhaps, that I might be killed too soon and go unnoticed

by you, *mon Lieutenant.* I should have grieved through purgatory and hell, in that case."

"How did you get here!"

"A party of four traders were leaving the Regence Hotel for Fez at two-thirty in the morning. They let me have a seat in the car. My presence in uniform would smooth out complications with the military guards. At daylight I was in Fez, and learned that a convoy of trucks was leaving for the camp. One of the chauffeurs gave me a seat with him—and two hundred francs purchased an old leather coat and a chauffeur's cap."

"That explains your arrival in camp. But the rest?"

"I had to dodge you and Braque, standing near the trucks. I had shaved my mustache in Fez. Yet I bumped into a fool who recognized me—that youngster, Meweik. He told me about this expedition; that he was going. I had six hundred francs and I offered them to him to swap places. He refused the money but agreed to let me have his equipment. Can you guess why?"

"Lingering respect for his captain," Martin suggested.

"No. In return for my severe treatment of Corporal Brenner, for saving him from further mistreatments. He dripped with gratitude. He wasn't too pleased to let his companions go into danger without him. He—" Prazini bestowed the words like jewels— "is a real Legionnaire. I came to offer you my past experiences, as a Legionnaire more than as a captain. You intend to leave the blockhouse soon?"

"I intend to evacuate my groups one by one," Fortier said. "Sneak them down the slope, mass them there—and wait for the explosion marking the end of Zergur, to charge into a disordered enemy. Sacrificing a few minutes, I'll increase our chances—"

"And I'd allow the lads outside to calm down a bit," Prazini advised. "In spite of what their leaders will tell them, many of them will think we are reenforcements come to help defense. They may go back to their camps and try to sleep a bit."

"But warriors will pour in here from every corner of the field," Martin protested. "Their numbers will increase."

"No; when the shooting started, the watchmen no doubt reported it to the chiefs who thought: 'Ah, something's doing by the blockhouse, probably a sortie of the garrison. The firing grows no nearer—it has failed.' So no one moved this way . . ."

"If we wait too long daylight will come," Martin insisted.

"We'll attack the circle of besiegers an hour and a half before light comes. Break through, make a running fight of it," Fortier said, "and when day breaks we'll be in reach of the artillery. Signal our positions and, being so near, the commander will try to extricate us."

"The three wounded—"

"Dope them," Prazini suggested. "Then remove the bandages. They'll feel no pain. And they will be lost in any case." He offered this solution simply, without emotion.

A sergeant entered.

"Message from our lines, Lieutenant," he told Martin, who was still his direct commander. "They report seeing the flare and wish to know what is going on. Can't reply, as the lamp doesn't function." The non-com looked with astonishment at the private seated with the officers; recognized Prazini and remained motionless, his jaw sagging. Then he drew himself straight, saluted. He left.

"That's a new sergeant—was corporal before. Where's Schultz?" Fortier asked.

"Schultz is one of the three wounded," Martin said.

VIII

A FAINT glow suffused the east.

Fortier followed the last group through the wires. They joined the others four hundred meters down the slope. There was animation among the natives, but no shots were fired. It seemed that the gradual evacuation of the blockhouse had gone unnoticed.

Prazini sat down beside Fortier.

"All right to talk," he said in a low voice. "They're making so much noise they can't hear us. Of all the loud mouthed slobs! But it's going to be hard to go through them—hard . . ."

"I have an idea we'll get through."

"Just an idea. I hope I don't. You are a conceited man, Fortier; you don't like me; but at heart you understand. I am not a Klaus; I don't commit suicide that way." He chuckled. "Guess Braque was right when he used to tell me I was cut out for an adjutant."

Not overscrupulous, a rash leader, but a real man and a Legionnaire, thought Fortier. Men such as he had made the old Legion, the glorious battalions of the past. New born sympathy for Prazini brought attendant concern. The epic side of his escapade, his willingness to risk his career with his former company at the moment of trial, would touch all within the Legion. That was something Legionnaires understood and appreciated. But the newcomers to Morocco, numberless in this emergency, would probably try him, and remain unaffected by the beauty of the gesture.

The incidents in the past unrolled in his mind his quarrel with Prazini over Brenner, the consequent unjust treatment of Klaus, the sergeant's suicide. He recalled the tears on the mutilated cheeks and his muscles tightened, the old loathing returned. Yet, was not Prazini's scorn of suicide justified? Had there not been a weak strain in Klaus? It was hard to understand. It was—Legion.

Once one pronounced that name, one could not be astonished at anything. In the ranks of the corps, men were what they had been outside; the motives and characters that had driven them to refuge in the Foreign Battalions still existed. Some remained liars, others thieves or killers. The petty greed of the climber thrived, with the more ambitious maneuvers of the more intelligent men. And the plodder, like himself. One quality welded them and united them—courage, unfailing, invariable courage. And beyond courage that name, that title, more precious to them than personal ambition: Legionnaire . . .

Prazini, reduced to the ranks but permitted to stay in the Legion, would have thought himself less punished. Roussel, Braque, Martin, himself, not one but would have suffered from a change. Not one would have accepted promotion at the price of leaving the Legion.

"Say, Martin's slow about his job, isn't he?" Prazini whispered. "I didn't like the way those wicks were fastened—the fire might eat through the loops and drop the ends. Would have done better with separate *bickfords.* Still, matter of taste."

They waited.

Rapid footsteps behind him, a shadow appeared at his side. The lieutenant clasped Martin's hand. The sub-lieutenant was shaking. The disposal of the wounded had taxed his nerves more than he would admit. One does not break standards of years lightly—even though he had hastened their ends but a few hours and spared them suffering.

Thirty seconds; they were passed and nothing happened.

"Grenades," Fortier whispered, touching Begues' back.

One minute, two minutes—and no explosion came. The sky was rifting into broad, light streaks, tinged with orange low on the horizon. In a short time, those below would see the Legionnaires on the slope.

"You're sure you lighted—"

"Yes, I waited and saw it burning."

"We'll wait two minutes longer," Fortier said, "then I'll go back. We can't let the supplies fall into their hands."

"I'll go back," Martin said.

"No second chance," Prazini spoke up suddenly. "I have pictured myself coming back here, reaching Zergur—and lighting the *bickford.* You wouldn't permit me before. Now, let me go."

Prazini was weeping, crying for his last chance. He believed that it was slated for him to perform the last rite at Zergur. The conviction was contagious.

Prazini wasted no time in farewells. He vanished as simply as he had appeared

earlier in the night. When he was gone it seemed that his appearance was a dream; the captain had not, could not have been with them.

A minute passed, another, a third. At the fifth, the ground quivered. The detonation of the charges threw Fortier to the ground. He was up again, hand high in the red glow of the explosion.

"*En avant, la Légion!*"

Stones and débris rained around them. The Legionnaires rolled down the slope without firing a shot. At the bottom, white garbed men massed to meet them. There were hundreds. Behind them were the hills and valleys, miles to the French lines. For a moment they formed an island of khaki in a sea of white and brown. Then they were through in a scattering of hand grenades.

Three hours later, the Legion battalion attacked with the bayonet to free the survivors of the detachment. There were forty-five of them, more than half wounded. They had fought their way over eight miles of enemy country. In saving twenty-five, thirty-five had died. According to Legion tradition, this was logical.

When the battalion brought back its own to the camp, the fife and drums came down the line and played the Legion's march. A wave of enthusiasm brought the other troops pouring from their tents. Once again, the Legionnaires had tried and succeeded.

Sub-Lieutenant Martin, wounded in the jaw and in the chest, went to the hospital. Fortier reported to the major.

Somehow his story seemed to circle in an ever narrowing loop about Prazini. The captain resumed his old prestige. His entire career, not always honest, invariably brave, had received consecration by the monument of charred stones marking the place where he had fallen.

The legend shaped itself—the ride from Meknes to Fez, and the sublime finish. Men smiled, shook their heads. Braque flushed with pride.

"A man, Prazini!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," Fortier heard his own voice agreeing, "he found his true place again, in the Legion. A true Legionnaire."

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

IN CONNECTION with his convict story in the issue, William Corcoran tells us something about two actual attempts at prison breaks.

New York City

It was just a year ago that a break very similar to that in "The Blue Wall" was frustrated in Sing Sing. Principal Keeper John Sheehy's eye happened to fall upon a lock which had been torn from its staples in a potato cellar beneath the mess hall. The grating gave access to a conduit for hot water pipes running to the bath-house. Sheehy crawled into the conduit and halfway along its length came on a side tunnel freshly excavated which led straight for the prison walls.

No one was in the tunnel at the time, and Sheehy confiscated two hammers, two trowels and six flashlights which he found at its end. The underground passage was forty feet in length and had reached a point three feet from the wall. Had the plot remained undiscovered another week a wholesale break would assuredly have followed.

IT WAS estimated that 600 cubic feet of earth had been removed from the tunnel. Not a trace of it was found in the prison, and to this day the officials have no idea of the manner of its disposal. The work had obviously been under way for months, and was so carefully planned that trucks were able to rumble by on a road three feet overhead without disturbing the timbered shoring erected in the tunnel.

Prisoners are allowed to spend their evenings in the mess hall, and it was concluded that some of them managed to steal away unobserved and pursue their subterranean operations. I do not believe that their identity was ever discovered.

THE prison escape narrated in "The Blue Wall" may possibly seem a wild flight of the imagination. As a matter of fact, there is more truth than fiction in the story. I took the customary liberties

with the plot, but there is not a detail in it which can not be substantiated.

Briefly, the facts are these: In July, 1893, a convict named Casey led a group of his fellows through a sewer that ran under the yard to the river just beyond the walls of Boston Prison. The last man to enter the drain never emerged. Casey located the sewer and drove a shaft to it much as Ransom does in the story. He got safely away, but was later arrested in London and returned to prison.

The patient cunning exercised through all the preliminaries to this famous break and the stark drama of its conclusion struck me most forcibly. The story was in my mind for a long time, and finally wrote itself. I hold no brief for convicted felons, but I admit that it is impossible for me to remain cold to the intensity of purpose displayed by any convict who succeeds in breaking through the walls, visible or invisible, which confine him in a modern penitentiary.

THIS reader has found a man who knows how to describe the noise of a battlefield. We'll have to agree. Few writers describe a war scene more graphically than Weston Martyr.

Redlands, California

I have waited almost twelve years for some writer to describe the peculiar noise made by an enemy howitzer when heard by a person in the line of fire. I have read many war stories, but Weston Martyr's "A Tour of Duty" is the first one I have run across that accurately tells of that particular sound—and how well he hits it off! "A soft and distant pop . . . almost innocent . . . the bang of a child's popgun." Correct, Mr. Martyr, and how that hollow PUNG did make us hit for cover, for in addition to being in the line of fire I almost always found myself near the end of the arc of the shell's trajectory.

My experience differs from Mr. Martyr's in that I could only pick out the sound when shelling was light, not "from the roar and thunder of bombardment," and the shell never "burst in the air" but happened to be high explosive which burst on contact. But what of that? What I want to do is to congratulate *Adventure* on publishing a story which so accurately describes the noise of a battlefield. Martyr was writing from experience—as do most of your writers. That's why I like *Adventure*.—HOWARD WARREN

A COVER criticism. In justice to the artist, Mr. Hutchison, I must say that he painted out the group of jacks referred to in his letter at our suggestion. He did it to make the man with the pole stand out more strongly. And truly enough, he said at the time that there was the slight danger that someone might misinterpret the scene after it was thus simplified. As does Mr. Anderson:

Mohonk Lake, New York

I have enjoyed reading your great magazine since its first issue, I believe. I have always found the covers of great interest and very true to the life they depicted. But I am now registering a protest. On the March 15th, the picture illustrating "Below Zero" is terrible, to say the least. Where and what part of the world did your artist, David C. Hutchison, ever see a "river hog" ride a log with his feet placed lengthwise of the log (and in "white water" at that)?

Now a "driver" always rides a log by standing sideways to the ends, and with his heels on one side and toes on the other, maintains his balance by lightly touching the surface of the water now and then with the tip of his pike pole. If there is no other log handy to stick his pike into he can move his log sideways in either direction by "burling", that is revolving the log with the calks in his shoes.

Again, the pike pole the driver is holding in the picture is all wrong. The real river pike is a pole about 12 to 16 ft. long with a spike 4 in. long made with a twist like a drill, which secures a good grip in the log. It's driven into the log and easily withdrawn by twisting to the left as you turn a screw driver. The instrument that driver in picture is holding is called a picaroon, used to load R. R. ties in cars and also cakes of ice, but never in a river drive. I can just imagine a bunch of genuine "river hogs" scanning that piece of art. And they will, as your great magazine is eagerly read in the lumber and river camps. Hutchison should know his stuff better. —BOB ANDERSON

Mr. Hutchison's reply:

Yonkers, New York

The editor of *Adventure* has sent me your letter in which you characterize my river cover as "terrible". Gosh, Bob, yuh don't mean that, do yuh? Outside of the fact that the man is riding a log in a way no man ever could ride one, and that he is using an ice pick for a pike pole, it isn't half bad, is it? I mean the water looks like water, and the logs look like wood, and the man has the right number of arms and legs, hasn't he? Well, Bob, I'll own up to a flaw in the picture. The pole does look short. You see, it was like this:

I tried to get the business end of it in the picture even if I had the man grasp it only four feet from the end. Another thing, at first I had a bunch of guys in the background, breaking the jam at the top of the chute. This guy in the foreground is part of that outfit, and there is a log in front of his which looks as if it might start another jam, and he is not only riding with his feet lengthwise of the log; he is actually running along it to push the jamming log aside. Think o' that, the crazy nut!

I'M A Canuck. I've handled cant-hooks and pike poles since I was twelve years old. We kids used to prod the logs in the flume to one side to make a space to swim in. The poles had straight spikes. Go up to the vicinity of Lake Nippissing on the Ottawa and you'll see 'em. But don't call the Frenchmen up there "river hogs".

On the level, now, Bob, haven't you handled more railway ties and ice cakes than saw logs?

—DAVID HUTCHISON

P.S. I am sending a copy of your letter to a lumberjack friend in North Bay, Ontario, Canada, and asked him to discuss it with the river drivers. If I get anything interesting in return, I shall give it to the Camp-Fire. —D. H.

A FEW words by Raymond S. Spears relative to his recent stories laid in the Salt Grass country.

Inglewood, Cal.

These stories come of the Gulf Coast Marsh Plain conditions. Prof. Nat. S. Shaler—than whom no naturalist ever wrote more delightfully, suggesting W. H. Hudson's Patagonia books—describes the Coastal Plain as a scientist should, yet with fascination. But I don't know that outside of Civil War Blockade runners of the Inlets, much was ever told or hinted about them. Wherever I've seen the swales they've stirred my heart. Whether in the Dakotas, on the Chesapeake, in Louisiana or in Texas, they are wilderness, miniature and fascinating, like the fairy forest of the Chaparral. The Dismal Swamp is about the only place of the kind fully described, though of late years "Mostly Mississippi" by Harold Speakman, and now, a piece in the *National Geographic* by Ralph Graves give the Louisiana swamps due word and pictorial attention.

It chanced I spent a winter at Alvin, between Galveston and Houston, Texas, and I was in the rain, the wind, the mud out around town. One of my friends there returned a carbine .30-30 which a sheriff had issued him to head off a fugitive convict. I heard stories; saw some things pretty plainly, though with the outsider's unaccustomed (but bulging) eyes. I like those places where one's eyes open with surprise and strange interest! The wider one's acquaintance with regions, the deeper his true knowledge, the more a traveler's astonishment. I always question myself if a locality looks, seems flat, no 'count, uninteresting. But the Salt Grass around the Gulf Coast would stir even jaded adventurers to attention, I'm sure.

—SPEARS

COMRADE F. A. Vincent, of Nogales, Arizona, sends in this clipping to disprove the contention that the gila monster is a safe pet to play with. The piece is taken from *The Arizona Republican*.

Casa Grande, April 28

Tom Reap, 62 years old, proprietor of the Moore pool hall, died at 12:20 o'clock this noon in the Casa Grande hospital, two hours after he had been bitten by a gila monster. The attending physician said last night that he would give "poisoning from a gila monster bite" as the cause of death in submitting the death certificate.

Mr. Reap was playing with the animal in the pool hall when he was bitten. The animal had been brought into the hall by one of the patrons and several were standing around looking it over and discussing it when Mr. Reap appeared. He began tapping it on the nose, witnesses said, and upon being cautioned replied:

"Oh, it wouldn't hurt you even if it did bite."

The reptile snapped at Mr. Reap, scratching one of his fingers, those present declared. But Mr. Reap, they said, continued to tap the animal on the nose. They said that suddenly it snapped again and this time it sunk its teeth deeply into Mr. Reap's thumb. It required five minutes to get the reptile loose, the men finally succeeding with the aid of a pair of pliers.

In the meantime Reap became unconscious.

He was taken to the Casa Grande hospital where he was given immediate care. He regained consciousness but his conditions was weak and all further efforts to save him proved futile. He again lapsed into unconsciousness and died at 12:20 o'clock.

A NOTE from Allan Vaughan Elston which will, I hope, tie up our recent discussion about the manner of tree growth.

Hollywood, California

In the June 1st Camp-Fire a comrade whose address I do not have made a point about a millstone which had been raised two feet on the top of a growing stump.

I think it is only fair to tell him that his point proves my own, in "Mystery Mountain," far from rebutting it. My point was that trees grow upward from the top. His millstone was on the top of the stump. Had the millstone been hanging from a spike driven in the *side* of the stump, it would have remained at a constant elevation.

IN FACT, long before I wrote Mystery Mountain, I had heard of the skeleton of a wolf found in the top of a tree. The explanation was that a trapper had set his trap on the ground, camouflaging it with leaves. A wolf was caught and died in the trap. A tree sprout sprouted under the trap, and in years lifted trap, wolf and all high into the air. So runs the yarn, told me by a trapper, and it seems to me improbable. However, it is an incident parallel to the one given by the comrade in June 1st Camp-

Fire. Neither of the incidents disproves my own thesis.

Please tell the comrade to take a lady's stocking, put a garter around it and turn it inside out, pulling the toe up through the top opening. The garter will stay at the same place. So grows the tree. But if he lays the garter across the top of the stocking, it will be forced up, like his millstone or like the skeleton of the wolf. Surely I have now suggested a *modus operandi* for laboratory experiment which is readily comprehensible.

—ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

I'VE received several more interesting letters on the unpredictable behavior of dynamite. Here is one of them. As to Mr. Greenhough's request for the resumption of "Old Songs That Men Have Sung", I'll leave that to the majority of you readers. If a sufficient number of you want it back, we'll have it back.

Dartmouth, N. S., Canada

As one of the old-timers who have trailed along with you since Anno Domini 1912, I am edging into the circle, round the Camp-Fire because I am lonesome, and also in the hope that I may be permitted to orate what's on my mind.

In common with most, if not all of your readers, the first thing I do when I get my current numbers of *Adventure* is to look over the table of contents, and see whom you have chosen to be present to entertain us during the ensuing two weeks. And the next thing I do is to turn up the Camp-Fire, and Ask Adventure. In the present, June 1st issue, there is a letter from Comrade Charles E. Roe, giving examples of the freakish and unexpected behavior of TNT, dynamite, picric acid, etc.—products with a mean disposition, of the chemist's art. So now I'll tell one.

HERE it is. But so that my credibility may not be impeached, I will say that I am a survivor of the great explosion that took place at Halifax, Nova Scotia, on December 6th, 1917, and I watched the smoke ascending from the burning steamship from a window of my home five minutes before the explosion occurred, at 6 minutes after 9 A. M.; and I would say that the explosion was not expected by us, as we supposed that the steamship was laden with case oil and we had seen similarly laden ships burn before with no loss of life or injury to persons.

And this fact is accountable for the large number of those who were standing on the shore watching the conflagration and were swept out of existence and no trace of them was ever found. What happened to us and how we were preserved alive, is another story which cannot be told here but I will say that there is on file in the office of the Provincial Board of Vital Statistics a list of 1635 known dead who were identified, but it is known that more than 2,000 were killed. But how many more than that number were killed will never be known.

BRIEFLY the case is as follows: The French steamship *Mont Blanc*, laden with 2,600 tons of TNT and other explosives for the war zone, was permitted by the naval authorities to enter the harbor for supplies and additional military stores, and was proceeding to the inner harbor, known as Bedford Basin; the Belgian relief steamship *Ima* was proceeding to sea, bound to a port in or near Belgium, with stores; and while passing each other in the narrows, a defect in either the steering apparatus, or the steerman's control on the part of the *Ima*, brought her into collision with the *Mont Blanc*, just forward of the engine room.

The *Mont Blanc* had stowed on the forward upper deck a number of steel drums filled with benzoin, and the bow of the *Ima* plowing in among them, burst some of them; and the contents streaming over the deck, ran down through an open hatchway directly into the fire room and, becoming ignited, set the ship on fire. The two crews, seeing that nothing could be done to save the ships, made their escapes in boats to the opposite, the Dartmouth shore and there were no casualties among the crews.

Although it was, and still is, believed by the great majority of people that the *Mont Blanc* was utterly destroyed, it is not the case, for though the ship carried 2,600 tons of TNT and other high explosives, only one compartment blew up, leaving the rest of the cargo intact. This was afterward salvaged and sent overseas in another steamship.

I AM indebted to a friend, Corporal Charles Russell, of the Royal Canadian Engineers, for the particulars in regard to the latter transaction. He told me that he was present, with detachments of troops from his own and other units, who salvaged the cargo and transferred it to the ship that took it overseas.

The explosion in the *Mont Blanc* put the fire out, and the ship quietly drifted ashore alongside one of the railway wharves at Richmond, while the *Ima* also drifted ashore on the Dartmouth side of the harbor, and was later repaired and sent overseas, but I do not remember what became of the *Mont Blanc*.

ANOTHER instance of the unreliability of explosives occurred one day in 1909, when a lighterman brought a load of dynamite and other explosives from a steamship just arrived from England to one of the railway wharves at Richmond, Halifax, while the men were all away at dinner, and there was no one there to receive it. He would not wait but landed it on the wharf or the tracks, anywhere as long as he landed and was rid of it. A steep grade led down to the wharf, and a short time after the lighter had departed a yard brakeman dropped down three cars (that is, let them run by gravity) right in and over those boxes of dynamite, breaking open

some, knocking others into the water, and scattering the rest. But nothing happened, unless you call swear words something when the men who had to load them returned from dinner.

Just another instance: While the shipyards at Halifax were being constructed half a dozen years ago, a good deal of rock excavating had to be done, and a large quantity had to be kept on hand in a building specially constructed for the purpose, and one day it caught fire and was utterly consumed. Again no explosion occurred.

I did not mean to write at this length when I began, so please accept my apology. Just a question: Is it in contemplation to ever reestablish the feature, "Old Songs That Men Have Sung"? Only one person, a lady, ever registered objections against it, and she wanted room for more fiction. I was strongly interested in this feature, and would like to see it established again. —H. E. GREENOUGH

A MEMBER of the Customs Service writes in to make an amendation to George A. Zerr's recent note in "Ask Adventure" on river boating.

South Bend, Washington

Referring to the article on river boating in the June 1st issue of *Adventure* by Mr. Geo. A. Zerr, it appears to me that the article is not quite clear on one point. The average reader would, it seems to me, gather that all boats equipped without board motors must bear identification numbers to be painted on the bow of the boat. This is not correct, for all boats equipped with outboard motors which are sixteen feet or under in length, measured from end to end over the deck excluding sheer, are not required to carry these identification numbers.

—W. M. KARTZMARK,
Deputy Collector of Customs

TO THOSE of you who are interested in armor, the following contribution giving various reference works will be of value.

In your "Ask Adventure" column of the June 1, 1930, issue of your magazine appears a query on early chain mail and the use of drawn wire in the making thereof. Permit me to add a few standard works on the subject which your correspondent might advantageously consult.

LAKING, Sir Guy Francis—A record of European Arms and Armor, 5 Vols.

DECOSSON, Baron C. A.—Catalogue of the exhibition of ancient helmets and examples of mail held at the Archaeological Institute, 1881.

GRANCSAY, Stephen V.—Chain Mail. The Armor and Arms Club, New York, Occasional Papers, No. 5.

FELDHAUS, Franz M.—Die Technik, 1914.

DUCHAILLU—The Viking Age, 2 vols., 1898 (illustrates many finds of riveted chain mail, dating from the beginning of the Christian era.)

LEWIS, Kenneth C.—The Wire Drawing Industry, 1928. [Worcester, Mass., Printed for Morgan Construction Co.]

The first authentic publication of the use of the draw plate appears to be that of the Theophilus c. 1100 A.D. (cf. "Quellenschriften fuer Kunstgeschichte", Vol. 7, Section 3, Chapter 1.

The virtue of a rapier lies of course not in flexibility but in elasticity; i.e., it should not bend too easily, but if it *is* bent it should upon the release of pressure spring back exactly to its original form without breaking or taking a "set". —THOMAS T. HOOPER

JOHN WILSTACH, as "one old police reporter" to another, questions Robert Carse about some of the statements he made in his recent story of the New York Police, "Aces."

Rhinebeck, N. Y.

I was interested in "Aces" by Robert Carse because he claims to write with authority of early police days of the Nineties and the early years of the century. If he did not so state I shouldn't write in, as there should be fiction license as well as poetic license, so to speak. However, when one handles facts, they are facts.

Lieutenant Becker was never head of the "Broadway Squad", as Mr. Carse states, because there was never a squad by that name. He had under him a batch of bullies supposed to break up gambling houses and tough resorts called "The Strong Arm Squad", so named by the police and so called in newspapers of the time. Downtown there were some detectives who spoke foreign languages, such as Italian and Yiddish, but no regular Italian Squad.

IN MR. CARSE'S tale, up in the car barn district Captain George Agnew leads his column out to raid like an infantry captain. He was killed in the street. Not a single police captain was so killed in the old days, for the reason that captains were in their station houses; instead of leading raids in person. Like generals, they died in bed! There're no police captain heroes in police annals, slain in street riots; old time police captains left that sort of thing to patrolmen. Four or five of them were popped off by the car barn gang.

The story tells in "the new twentieth century", after relating what happens in the Nineties, of arresting men on the technical charge of the Sullivan Law. Figuring time elapsing in the tale, one sees that it wasn't yet 1911, when the law was passed. A bit previous!

I am an old police reporter. Don't know where Mr. Carse got his misinformation, but when he states that he writes from facts he should be sure of his information. —JOHN WILSTACH

Mr. Carse's reply follows:

Westport, Conn.

The editor has sent on to me your letter concerning my story, "Aces". This, in reply:

In "Aces", I wrote a fiction story; the note, in the Camp-Fire, the way I conceived it, referred mainly to the "third degree", for its use was sure to draw fire from some of the readers. I of course, in part, referred to the other facts used in the story, "varnished" or otherwise.

I have, as you may have imagined from the story, suffered the same ignominy as yourself, and been "an old police reporter". My facts were at first hand, and verified in the reliable morgues of several New York papers. Becker's squad, as I got it, was called by several names: yours, and mine, too. But Becker is dead, and so is the squad . . . There was, emphatically, and unofficially if not officially, an Italian Squad, of which such men as Petrosino and Fiaschetti were members, if only for a short time. On this I must stand firm; and this you may readily verify, as I have.

YOU generalize very broadly about precinct police captains in general. I reiterate that, although I embodied a number of facts, or what I believe to be facts, in my story, it was, above all else, a fiction story, not an historical article. Yes, there were—actually—at least half a dozen cops killed by the car barners. If no police captains, thank you for that.

In regard to your reference to the Sullivan Law, I only attempt to remind you, a literary man, that the part of the story which seems flawed to you was a transitional one, in which no real date was used. To a man born, say, in the late Seventies, 1911—or even 1930—might seem the "new twentieth century". After all, the article still has seventy years to shoot.

This, a small point, for a man of your experience must realize that from the parts of my story you left unattacked, my own possession of police procedure data and State law, would include the date of the inception of the Sullivan Law.

Please believe, in parting, that I have not tried to "fake facts". There are far too many men of your type who closely read *Adventure*.—ROBERT CARSE

OUR Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The spirit of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There are no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

ASK *Adventure*

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Cruise

PUTTING the finishing touches on a forty-six foot schooner bound round the world. The *Ask Adventure* department feels gratified that Mr. Cook and his comrades, who are taking three years for the trip, have made use of many of our experts during the past year while the enterprise was being planned. The *Swordfish*, with her amateur crew, left Chicago June 3rd.

Request:—"First, the crew. There are five of us. Earl (Buck) Evans, all American tackle from Harvard, who has been playing with the Chicago Bears for the past four years, navigator; Paul, his brother, an icthyologist and taxidermist; Don Dixon, radio operator; Mrs. Cook, artist and cook par excellence, and myself, writer and photographer. Three of the fellows have completed an intensive six months tutorage in the Weems system of navigation and are competent to "shoot."

The ship. The plans and design are from the board of Murray Watts and the boat was built in Maine in 1923. She is a rigidly constructed 46′ fisherman type gaff-headed schooner with a beam of 13½′ and a draft of 7′. Construction double-Lloyds throughout. There is an iron keel weighing 7300 lbs. and the necessary inside ballast. The boat has always had the best of care (paid captain) and is as sound as the day the masts were first stepped. Ample sleeping accommodations for seven or eight.

In general, unless you think better, the route will follow that of Capt. Pidgeon, Voss, Ralph Stock and others. It will take us via the Great Lakes, Welland Canal, Lake Ontario, Transmarine Canal, and Hudson River to New York City. From there we go to Bermuda, thence to Cuba, Jamaica, Panama Canal, Galapagos, South Sea Islands, New Zealand, Australia, Indian Ocean, Aden, Red Sea, Suez Canal, Nile (both branches), Mediterranean, Gibraltar, West Coast of Europe, back to the Azores and across the Atlantic via the southern route to Pernambuco and back to the U. S.

The route, we hope, will take us to places of interest, historical, geographical and otherwise, and we believe that three years should give us plenty of time to make the trip leisurely and safely.

What I would like to obtain from you is information on the lesser known spots, places that the tourist doesn't reach and still accessible by our craft. Then I want your ideas and suggestions on change of rig, provisions, precautions, in fact, anything that might occur to you if you were making such a cruise. Photo of ship enclosed."

—R. H. COOK, Chicago, Illinois

Reply, by Captain Dingle:—First let me say that if I were making the voyage you outline, I would not alter the *rig* of your vessel in any respect. I might add a squaresail yard, permanently rigged, just below the fore crosstrees or spreader, sail to be set flying from the deck. I would have a stout, smaller squaresail made for running in hard breezes. But the ship as she is would suit me very well indeed for a long jaunt in tall water. She is much the size of my old *Gauntlet*, except that *Gauntlet* was fifty feet overall, part of which was clipper bow.

I am afraid you won't find many places of real interest untouched by trippers, damn 'em! Where your boat can go you'll find them. But perhaps I may suggest one or two spots of interest to you. (By the way, before it slips my memory, I'd like to remark on the photo you send. If that was the way she set her maintopmast staysail—or fisherman's staysail—I'd suggest it can be vastly improved. As it is in the picture it's a backed sail without doubt, and is holding her back rather than helping her. The lower tack should be hauled down taut, and if it's taken on the fore side of the spreaders so much the better. Then the luff will stand better. As it is, the leech is tauter than the luff, and the drive of the sail towards aft.)

For places to call; I'd certainly visit Juan Fernandez, for sheer beauty if not for sentiment. For sentiment you could see the real Robinson Crusoe Island—Tobago—on your way to the Canal Zone. And if you miss other parts, don't fail to make Tasmania a port. That is one of the beauty spots of the world; Ceylon is another. In the Pacific I'd omit places like Tahiti and Honolulu and favor such gems as the Marquesas, Fiji and Samoa. New Caledonia also will repay your call; and it is not greatly favored by trippers. All these places you will find on looking at your chart are on a fair track, and all well on the way to your Australian ports. You will find our Antipodean Colonies very friendly, and very much along your own lines in everything but expense. That is very moderate down under.

STORES? You'll smile perhaps when I tell you that for years I stored my schooner from Sears Roebuck's catalogue. The best grade of their stuff is the best sea stores I ever had, and the cost is far less than charged elsewhere. You can estimate amounts by any housekeeper's method, adding about one-third for contingencies. Stores will scarcely be cheaper anywhere than in Chicago, canned stuff I mean. A couple of small kegs of carefully selected corned beef and pork will be useful; choose it yourself and have it specially corned with a little stronger pickle; then have care to see that no part of the meat is ever permitted to come above the liquor, and it will last perfectly good until eaten up. Get real hardtack and depend upon the galley for softer bread. It's easy to make biscuits and johnny-cake at sea. We always did.

Take plenty of green vegetables, juicy fruits, and in spite of the fun poked at the custom by ignorant sea story writers who never went to sea, take lime juice! You'll be glad, when your tank water begins to go stale. And take plenty of emergency water. My own plan was to lash a small keg in the dinghy, and change the water every port. Then I carried a dozen ½-gallon bottles of Poland Water, stowed so inaccessibly that there was never temptation to use it ordinarily. It saved my life when the *Gauntlet* was wrecked, though.

Your letter, which I just notice is dated February, only reached me yesterday, April 30th, after following me to Andros, Jamaica, and home since leaving *Adventure* office readdressed. Please pardon the delay, which you will see was not all my fault.

I'd avoid the Bahamas if I were you. There is nothing to see there, and the waters are bad for draughts of more than five feet anywhere outside Nassau Harbor, and that's a bad one too in a blow. Jamaica is fine; so is Porto Rico, and Cuba. Bermuda is the gem of them all.

Automatic *vs.* Revolver

DONEGAN WIGGINS prefers revolvers.

Request:—"Does the .45 Colt automatic pistol have more or less energy than the Colt .45 revolver? Is the automatic as used by the Army today as reliable as the revolver? Which would you recommend for an all-around sidearm for camping and hunting big game as found in Pennsylvania?"

—JAMES K. STAGG, Pottsville, Pennsylvania

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—The .45 automatic Colt gives 340 foot pounds energy. The .45 Colt revolver with smokeless powder gives 330 foot pounds energy, and with the UMC black powder load, gives 460 foot pounds.

The revolver is generally considered, particularly by myself, as more reliable than the automatic pistol. Most handgun users join me in this belief, I think. But the Colt .45 and Super .38 automatics are very fine guns.

For the most practical sidearm, I'd select a .22 Colt or Smith & Wesson, as you can kill lots of small game for pot meat with it at small noise or expense. I don't care to carry a heavy beltgun when hunting, for what I can't kill with a rifle I can't hope to kill with a revolver. That's my personal preference, anyhow.

Photo

PICTURE making is primarily a chemical operation, and accurate laboratory methods are necessary for safety and success.

Request:—"Should flashlight films be developed in same developer as daylight views, or is there a formula that would work better on them?"

—K. C. MORSE, Sterling, Colorado

Reply, by Mr. Paul L. Anderson:—Ninety-nine per cent. of flashlight pictures are underexposed. Use enough powder to get full illumination, and develop precisely as you would develop a daylight picture *of the same inherent contrasts*.

As for getting clean negatives, you must remember that all photographic operations are essentially chemical operations, and the same degree of cleanliness is required as in the chemical lab. Slopping hypo around the darkroom, using trays or graduates with a residuum from the last operation, failure to wash the fingers thoroughly after dipping them into the hypo, allowing dust to remain in the darkroom—all these and many other things will cause failure.

As a matter of principle, I never allow a graduate or tray to dry with any solution in it; the solids crystalize out and are difficult to remove. The same thing applies to tanks and stirring rods; rinse them well, *immediately* after emptying or using. Keep a box of Gold Dust handy, and before putting away a tray throw a handful of the powder in, moisten it, scrub well, and rinse thoroughly. Never permit hypo to drip on shelves or floor. Wash the fingers immediately in running water after getting hypo on them—or any other chemical, for that matter.

And please don't commit the excruciating folly of

keeping a drinking glass in the darkroom, or—worse yet—drinking from a graduate. I have known a lot of people who did this, and one of them made the mistake of using his tumbler to hold a solution of potassium cynide. It was his last mistake.

The whole amount of it is that all that's required for technical success in photography are care, precision and cleanliness—just the same as in any other chemical operation. But if by clean negatives you mean negatives that are free from fog, and show clear glass along the edges—don't worry about it. It's the print you're after, and a slight amount of fog does no harm—merely retards the printing very slightly. Many of my best plates are decidedly gray along the edges, but it doesn't matter unless it's excessive, and the print you send shows no sign of excessive fog; it's a good, clean, bright print—no kicks on it at all.

Football

FIELD goal and forward pass records.

Request:—"1. What is the longest field goal that was ever made and was it a placekick or a dropkick?

2. What was the longest pass that has been completed?

3. In what year was the forward pass first used?" —BILL REESE, Magna, Utah

Reply, by Mr. John B. Foster:—1. Longest field goal is from placement, 65 yds. made by J. T. Haxall, Princeton, Nov. 30, 1882.

2. Muller, California, is credited with the longest pass, 70 yds., 1920.

3. Forward pass first used in 1906.

South America

HOW a missionary may become a trader.

Request:—"I am twenty-four years old, unmarried, and wonder whether it would be possible to go to South America as a missionary, also as a trader.

1. What are good trade goods?

2. Are any of the Indians really savage, *i.e.* unfriendly?

3. Where would you suggest?

4. Fare—perhaps half-fare?

5. Climate?

6. Are the reports of head hunters true?"

—W. H. PRESTON, Jamaica, Long Island

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—A great number of the missionaries who go to South America eventually become quite well to do in the trading business. One of the largest ranches in Chile is owned by the sons of a missionary who got the deed in his name from the government, who has since claimed it was intended for a British Missionary Society and not for him personally. A number of large American companies such as patent medicine companies, jewelry concerns, etc., offer missionaries their agencies. The usual salary for a missionary down that way runs to about $210 per month, sometimes with expenses also, so the life is a bit attractive, especially in the cities and towns where the usual missionary stations himself. Some of the Indians are really benighted, figured by our standards, and are given to head hunting and cannibalism, to say nothing of minor infractions of our code of morals.

1. Good trade goods depends on what portion. What would be good trade goods for a Yahgan who greases himself with whale oil and goes stark naked in zero weather would not be a good article for a head hunting Jivaro or a canoe San Blas of the Caribbean coast. In the main, however, it has to do with personal ornamentation, dress, or weapons in whatever locality you happen to locate. If you decide on the spot I will give you what would appeal in that particular locality.

2. I assure you some of them are really savage and will commit murder without the batting of an eyelash. Unfriendly is a mild term for some of them.

3. Eastern Peru, around the big bend country where the Amazon turns east, on the north bank.

4. Fare, approximately $200, plus a long mule and canoe trip.

5. Climate in this particular portion is humid, tropical.

6. Yes, and I have reiterated them.

Glider

AMONG the personnel of a glider club should be a fabric worker, a painter, a cabinet maker and a man who has a good hill bare of trees with a prevailing wind up the hill.

Request:—"I should like to get the following information on gliders.

1. About how much will it cost to make one? I have four friends and all have much interest in building a glider.

2. I should like to have the dimensions of a glider.

3. Can a motor be installed on a glider?"

—DENIS CANEDY, Lake Pleasant, Massachusetts

Reply, by Lieut. Jeffrey R. Starks:—1. A primary glider costs from $90 to $300 for material f.o.b place of purchase.

A soarer (soaring glider) costs from $200 to $500 for material.

Both these estimates plus from $25 to $55 for rubber cord for launching.

2. The average primary or secondary glider is from 32 to 38 feet wing span, about half that in length and weighs about 200 to 350 lbs. Soaring gliders are about 50 feet in span and weigh from 350 lbs. to 550 lbs.

Blueprints and specifications may be obtained for from $1.25 to $10.00.

Two supply houses whose names I have handy at this time are:

Air Associates, Inc. of Garden City, L. I., N. Y. and Johnson Airplane and Supply Co. of Dayton, Ohio.

Several glider manufacturers are:

Aerogliders, Rochester, Indiana.

Crawford Airplane Supply Co. (Pelican Gliders) of Venice, Cal.

Mead Gliders, 12 So. Market Street, Chicago, Ill.

Gliders, Inc., Chanin Bldg., New York, N. Y.

Alexander Aircraft Co., Colorado Springs, Col.

Also advise you addressing the Nat'l Glider Assn., Union Trust Bldg., Detroit, Mich. They put out good dope, as do the Alexander people, on the formation of glider clubs.

A glider is not easy to build, and no doubt you will make many mistakes in its construction before you are through with it. Among the personnel of your glider club should be a good fabric worker (or tailor), a painter, a cabinet maker and some one who can make a trailer to carry the glider around on, also owning a car to tow same. Another requisite for gliding is a good hill bare of trees with a prevailing wind up the hill.

3. The Aeronca C-2, put out by the Aeronautical Corp'n of America, Cincinnati, Ohio, is an airplane with a small motor, and this motor may, I believe, be detached and the plane used as a glider. It is really a glider with a motor attached, and hardly an airplane. In a recent issue of Paramount Sound Newsreel News they published an account of a glider with a motorcycle engine doing its stuff at Long Beach, Cal. Am sending you their news on the subject; perhaps you might see this on the screen.

Cowhand

THE average ranch has little use for Eastern job-hunters.

Request:—"1. What is the average pay a cowhand gets per month and what are the possibilities of getting such a job? Does experience count?

2. Are there any wild horses in any of the Western States and is it true that anybody who captures one or more of these wild horses has the privilege of keeping it? Also is it true that some States are trying to get rid of the wild horses that inhabit the ranges.

3. If you do not quite get the drift of the above, I would suggest that, speaking frankly, I would like a job out West rounding cattle and the like, even to stoop to cooking.

I admit that I am a greenhorn when it comes to work mentioned above, but (not bragging) I have an uncanny ability to catch on to any given assignment. Besides, I am considered a pretty good horseman."

—JOSEPH P. GUGGOLZ, New York City

Reply, by Mr. Frank Earnest:—1. A good cowhand is paid from $75.00 to $100.00 per month, and board, but the possibilities for a greenhorn to obtain such a job are mighty slim. Experience certainly does count.

2. Yes, there are quite a few wild horses in Wyoming and Montana and I believe also in New Mexico and any one who can capture them certainly has the privilege of keeping any of them which are unbranded. I do not think it would be at all profitable capturing these wild horses, as only about one out of every ten a fellow gets is worth anything. I used to get a few myself, but I never made any money at it; however, it is great sport and requires a string of darn good saddlehorses and a lot of horse knowledge.

3. I get the drift of your questions and, while I can not promise you a job, I do not think you would have a great deal of trouble getting employment in either Wyoming or Montana during the months of July and August. If you have an automobile and a camp outfit you can tour around through the country from ranch to ranch and would undoubtedly strike a job that way better than any other way.

Since the advent of the automobile and the invasion of the West by good, bad and indifferent, the ranchmen have been flamboozled (this is my own word) to such an extent that they are rather skeptical of Easterners in general and it is not such an easy matter for an Easterner to obtain employment nowadays as it was some ten years ago.

British Army

BEFORE Lord Cardwell's reforms in 1871, commissions were bought and sold.

Request:—"May I trouble you for a little assistance on the history of that very interesting practise of the sale of commissions, formerly in vogue in the British army?

1. When and how did the practise originate?

2. What were the details of its working? For instance, when a man bought a commission as cornet or ensign, did he have to satisfy any Governmental requirements, as well as pay the man from whom he bought it? Could a civilian buy any commission that happened to be going, or did he have to start at the foot? Again, having bought a commission, were there any checks or limitations upon the rapidity with which he might buy his way up the ladder? Further, if he earned a promotion by length of service or gallantry, and was gazetted, did he have to buy it also?

3. How were multiple commissions arranged? For example, one man was apparently at once a major in the Coldstreams, a lieutenant-colonel of the line, and a major-general (of what, by the way?). The majority in the Foot Guards cost him the equivalent of $18,000.00. How about the other jobs? Presumably it was something like the present arrangement whereby a lieutenant in the British

Army is loaned to the Egyptian Army, in which he becomes a major? But just how was it worked? It makes one a trifle dizzy, doesn't it? Seeing the situation was a little different from the relations between the British and Egyptian Governments, or our own Government and the Philippine or Haitian Constabularies.

4. When, how, and under what circumstances, was the practise discontinued?"

—WM. H. BRADDOCK, Jarbidge, Nevada

Reply, by Capt. Glen R. Townsend:—1. The practise of purchasing commissions in the British army grew up during the early part of the 18th century and was in full force about the time of the American Revolution. It developed from a system for raising troops employed by the Edwards and later kings of England.

When the king desired to increase his army he would designate some distinguished soldier or gentleman of high rank to raise a regiment. Originally the king would pay a certain sum for each recruit, but as the system developed and the king's funds were low the individual raising the regiment would receive no money but would be allowed to meet his expense by the sale of commissions in the regiment. This developed into the recognized purchase system.

2. In theory a man purchasing a commission was supposed to be qualified for the rank he obtained but in practise the reverse was often true. Many holders of commissions never even served with troops. Men with money and influence bought up the higher grades with the result that officers who could not afford the large amounts which the high commissions cost found themselves without prospect of promotion. Personal and political influence became much more valuable assets in the army than ability or knowledge of the profession of arms. There were exceptions, as always, and even when the system was at its worst some men of real ability managed to struggle upward without the aid of wealth.

3. In the case of multiple commissions the situation was not greatly different from that which existed in our army during the World War when an officer might rank as a major in the Regular Army and as a lieutenant-colonel or even a colonel in the National Army. That is, he was given a temporary commission of higher rank but reverted to his Regular Army status at the close of the war. Wolfe, the hero of Quebec, for example, was a lieutenant-colonel of the line in the British army when he was selected by Pitt to command the Canadian expedition and given the temporary rank of major-general. Officers of the Guard regiments ranked a notch higher when serving with officers of the line. This would account, I think, for your officer who was a major in the Coldstreams, a lieutenant-colonel in the line and a major-general, all at the same time. Ordinarily, of course, an officer would only perform the functions pertaining to his highest commission, but there were instances, I believe, where an officer not only drew pay for two commissions held at the same time but performed functions connected with each commission.

4. The purchase system created so much scandal and inefficiency in the army that it was finally abolished in 1871 when Gladstone was prime minister of England. The real credit, however, belongs to Edward, Lord Cardwell, one of the ablest administrators the British army has ever had. The whole system of purchase of commissions grew up and was always governed by custom more than by regulation so that the details of the practise varied from time to time and even in different regiments at the same time.

Wisconsin

THE St. Croix, a river with wooded banks and occasional rapids, ideal for the intrepid canoeist.

Request:—"I am anxious to obtain information as to the practicability of a trip down the St. Croix River.

Three years ago my sister and I took the Flambeau trip in a duckboat, going from Park Falls to Ladysmith. We plan to use this type of boat again, as we feel that it is safest.

We would like to start as near as possible to the headwaters of the St. Croix. What, in your opinion, would be the best point? As we will go up by motor, with a trailer for the boat, we will probably be able to get much farther up by this means than we would by train.

Good maps will of course be necessary. Shall we write for these to the Department of the Interior?

What length of time should such a trip take? There is no particular need for haste, and we would like to go as far down the river as would be practical and interesting. Which would be the best month, We took the Flambeau trip in August, and found the weather conditions most pleasant.

While we have heard so much about the beauty of the St. Croix country that we have become interested in making the trip, we shall of course substitute some other itinerary if we find the St. Croix trip for any reason impracticable. Can you suggest any other river within about the same radius which surpasses the St. Croix in beauty of scenery, freedom from obstructions such as dams, etc., and wildness of location? I mention the last as we'd like to do an article or two about the trip, and would rather do something which hasn't been done too often."

—MISS FLORENCE B. JUDD, Evanston, Illinois

Reply, by Mr. George A. Zerr:—Since you have made the Flambeau trip, a voyage down the St. Croix River might appeal. Personally I think May is too early for this latitude. June or August would be my suggestion; it all depends on how you can weather the outdoors.

The St. Croix River rises in northern Wisconsin at an elevation of about 1,000 feet above sea level; has a total length of 164 miles; a total drainage area of 7,650 square miles and a total fall of about 345

feet, or an average fall of about 2.44 feet per mile; and an annual discharge of 4,200 second feet near the mouth.

The St. Croix flows through a semi-agricultural country. In general the banks are wooded and from the river, especially on the northern part, the country appears quite wild. In the northern part the river flows through sandy soil between banks from 15 to 50 feet high. In its central and lower reaches the fall is quite marked, and the banks, or rather bluffs, rise 100 feet or more above the river. The lower 23 miles of the river, to the mouth, comprise in reality a lake of very little slope or current, averaging about 3,000 feet wide, called Lake St. Croix. There are only two dams at present on the St. Croix, one at St. Croix Falls, about 50 miles above the mouth where a head of 50 feet is developed for power purposes and Nevers Dam, about 10 miles above St. Croix Falls, where a head of about 15 feet is developed for storage.

Rapids are found throughout the river above Taylors Falls. The most marked rapids, called Kettle River Rapids, are at a point 90 miles above the mouth. Between Taylors Falls and the head of Lake St. Croix the river is navigable for small boats. From the head of Lake St. Croix to the mouth the river is navigable by steamboats. Above Taylors Falls the river is navigable by canoe throughout most of its length; but a canoeist would have to look out for the rapids, which occur occasionally, and would have to be an expert to pass some of them at low water, although most of them are navigable by canoe at higher stages.

The principal towns are Solon Springs at the source of the river, Grantsburg, Taylors Falls, Stillwater at the head of Lake St. Croix about 23 miles from the Hudson, and Prescott at the mouth. Any good map of Wisconsin and Minnesota will show the location of the principal tributaries and towns. None of the towns on the river is large.

The mouth of the St. Croix at its entrance to the Mississippi is 41 miles below Minneapolis.

In the vicinity of Taylors Falls the river is about 200 feet wide and is noted for its historic and scenic beauty. Here are the Dalles of the St. Croix. The banks are abrupt and on the Minnesota side are peculiar formations of granite and a brownish sandstone, and are known as Paint Pot, Devil's Kitchen, Devil's Chair; and a bottomless pit about 18 feet in diameter.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. DO NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

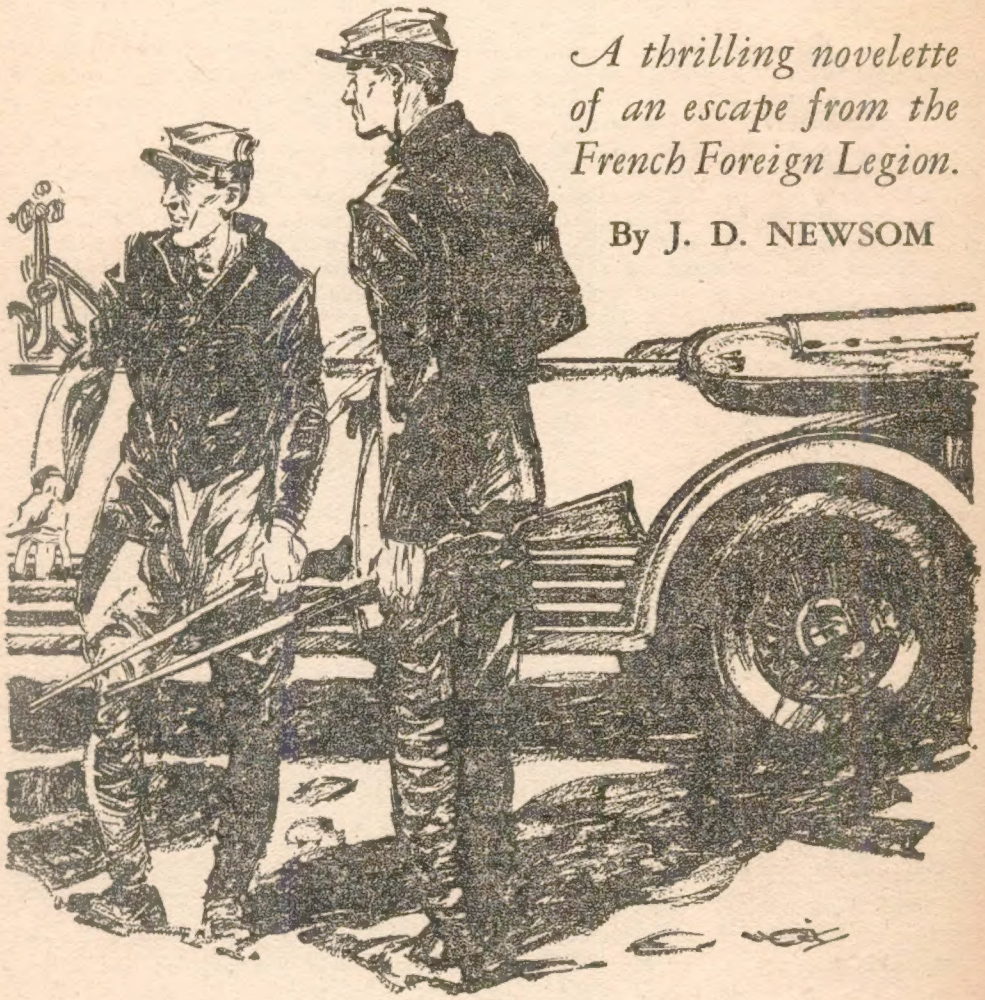
A Complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

THE TRAIL AHEAD—THE NEXT ISSUE OF *ADVENTURE*, AUGUST 15th

The LAST SALUTE

A thrilling novelette of an escape from the French Foreign Legion.

By J. D. NEWSOM



YOU WILL FIND IN THIS ISSUE ALSO

Novelettes by L. PATRICK GREENE and WILLIAM WEST WINTER; also Stories by S. B. H. HURST, HARRY G. HUSE, JAMES W. BENNETT, ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN and RAYMOND S. SPEARS; and a Serial by ARED WHITE.

Still farther ahead

September 1st Issue

IT'S been some time since we were treated to a novel by ROBERT SIMPSON. His last one, you remember, was the unforgettable "Calvert of Allobar," which many of you called one of the finest stories you'd ever read. Well, here's another of the same calibre. "The Forehead of Goliath" is a gripping narrative of the Slave Coast and the lust for power that drives men, even in the isolated reaches of Black Africa. In two big instalments.

HAROLD LAMB'S "The Crusades" was a best-seller. You'll find much of the glamour and gallantry of that book in "The Long Sword", in this issue.

Not by any means an ordinary detective story is "Mystery Ship". This new novelette of crime and detection by ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON presents the most baffling problem of any in his recent series. Diamonds—and murder on the high seas. . . .

Deep in the heart of Tibet, in the very holy of holies of the Yellow Lamas, a lone white adventurer attempts what none of his race had ever dared before. A story by SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL.

GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES, noted soldier-of-fortune, who has been acquainting us with some of the absorbing adventures of his life, continues with an exciting article on the gentle art of smuggling firearms. He calls it, "Gun Running on the Spanish Main".

Have you been caught in the gripping meshes of "The Spy Net"? ARED WHITE completes this brilliant novel of military espionage in this number.

These are but a few of the fine things that are in store for you in the September 1st issue. Watch for it!

Adventure

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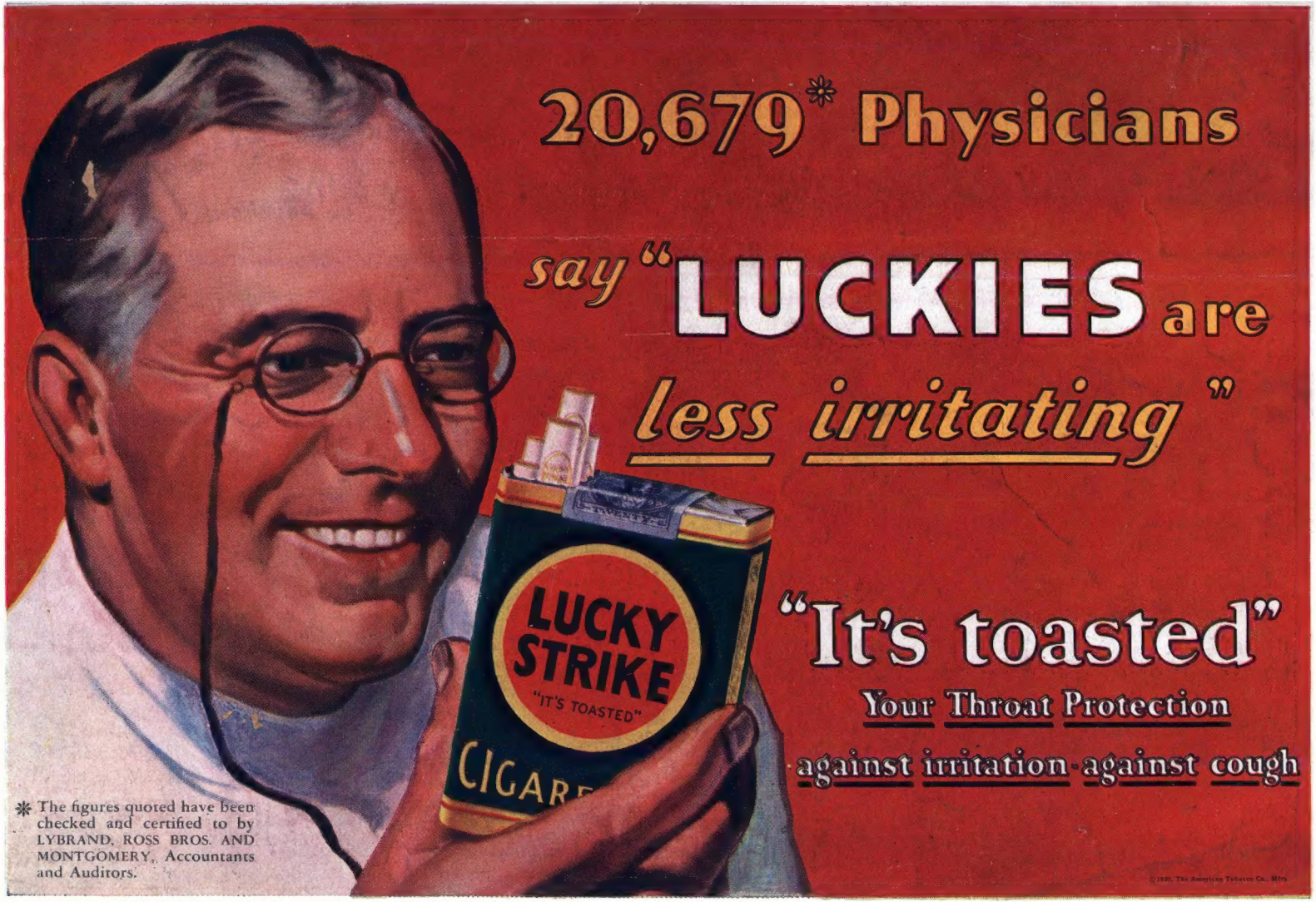
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